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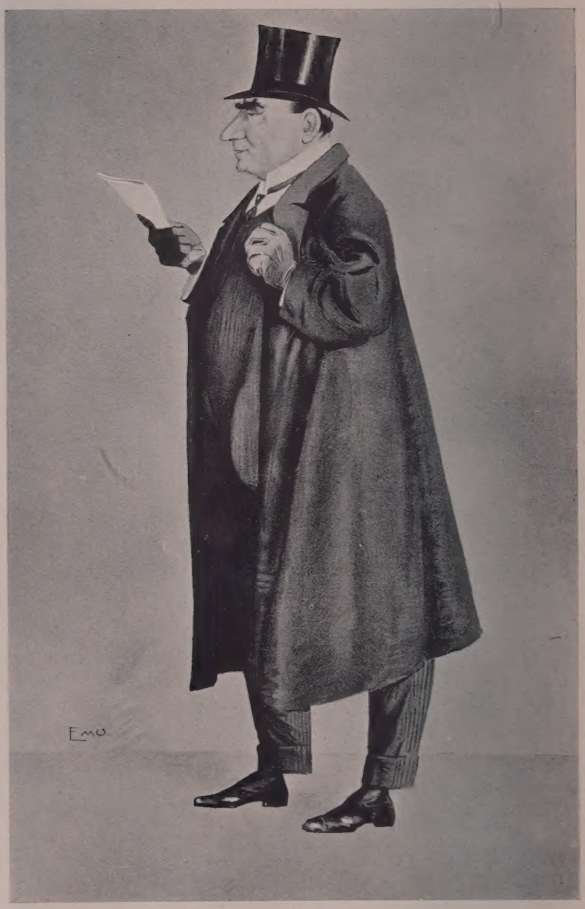
SIR ARTHUR PINERO'S
PLAYS AND PLAYERS



SIR ARTHUR PINERO

a caricature which appeared in *The World.*

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SIR ARTHUR PINERO'S PLAYS AND PLAYERS

by

HAMILTON FYFE

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Sir Arthur Pinero's Plays and Players

CHAPTER ONE

"THE MAN IN THE SCOTCH CAP"

On the night of the 25th November 1871, there was a slight disturbance in the pit of the Lyceum Theatre in London.

The manager, Colonel Bateman, went to the back of the stalls; he asked what was the matter. Were the pittites not satisfied with the new seats, seats with backs to them and cushioned too, a great advance, it seemed to him, from the bare benches they had sat on hitherto?

Yes, the pittites said, they agreed that this was an improvement.

Well, he enquired, was there anything else they wanted. To which a young man with dark eyes and sharp features, wearing a Scotch cap on his head, replied that they wanted neater programmes, not the "streamers," long bills printed coarsely on the cheapest of paper, which the Lyceum continued to use after many theatres had given them up.

Colonel Bateman promised to consider this and went away little supposing that within five years this young man would be a member of the Lyceum Company or that the lapse of twenty-five would see him

the most famous of English dramatists and a very rich man.

"The Man in the Scotch Cap" he was called by his fellow first-nighters. He was only sixteen, but he looked older; he was already a leader among men. None of those who waited shoulder to shoulder outside the pit doors (there were no queues then) was more insistent than this young man upon the rights of these humble playgoers.

Especially indignant he became when managers took off several rows of the pit and added them to the stalls. "Why can't they all behave like John Hollingshead at the Gaiety?" he would ask. Hollingshead, producer of burlesques, never diminished the size of his pit, nor did he charge for programmes.

Tragedy, comedy, burlesque, melodrama, extravaganza (a favourite description in those days), this young man went to them all. He had an unappeasable delight in the theatre. No obstacles were put in the way of his indulging the taste. Henry Arthur Jones, his principal rival at one period, came of Puritan stock, was not allowed to set foot in a theatre. Pinero's family had no objection to playgoing.

Originally Pin-heiro, the name had come from Portugal many generations earlier. The young first-nighter's family had for the most part followed the law. His grandfather had been one of the last "tellers" of the Exchequer, a post long since abolished. His father was a London solicitor who lived in what was then a pleasantly rural part of London,

the Old Kent Road. In a little three-storied house on that thoroughfare, made famous by Albert Chevalier, the future dramatist was born on 24th May 1855. He was christened Arthur Wing.

In the office of his father in Lincoln's Inn Fields the young man got his first insight into human nature; made his first observations of character, eccentric, and commonplace; took his first mental notes for the plays he was to write.

This was when he had left school and was a student at the Birkbeck Institute. By day he sat in his father's room, watching all who came for advice, marking their peculiarities, imitating them after they had gone. In the evenings he went to classes (if there was no first-night!). He was supposed to be studying law, preparing himself to join the family firm.

His thoughts roamed far away from that destiny. He saw himself a famous actor, bowing to the applause of crowded theatres. He saw himself an author, listening while his words were spoken by beautiful women and the leading actors of the day. He did not conceal his ambition. He told everybody that he meant to go on the stage if he could.

At the Birkbeck he studied that fearful art, elocution; he took part in many performances, some of them Shakespearean. There are people who still remember with a thrill what they call his " wonderful " performance of *Hamlet* without scenery, which was his farewell to the amateur boards. He had been given an engagement at the Theatre Royal in Edin-

burgh. At nineteen he went to Scotland to make his fortune: about that he had no doubts. He was to be "general utility" man; his salary was a guinea a week; he had to work hard for it.

Every kind of small part he had to play—with what versatility he could. Young men, old men, middle-aged men, servants, lords, labourers—the lad of nineteen did his best with all of them and was never disgraced. He had a humble lodging, lived plainly, was in the theatre acting and rehearsing often for fourteen hours a day. When he had any time off, he would walk on the hills around the city and sometimes he would sketch. He was busy with his pencil one day when he noticed far off black smoke arising, and then saw flames. He spoke to an old Scot who happened to pass, asked him what building was on fire.

"It's the de'il's hoose," was the gloating reply.

"The—the de'il's hoose?" echoed the young Englishman. "What's that?"

"Whaur they act plays, the theeaterr," grunted the old Scot, and was surprised to see his questioner leap up and dash off in the direction of the fire.

It was, indeed, the Theatre Royal which burned. It was destroyed before nightfall; the company were "on the rocks," in the vivid phrase which used too often to be heard among "professionals." Some of them were sent, however, to Liverpool where a play by Wilkie Collins called *Miss Gwilt* was being rehearsed. In the playbill of this figured Mr. A. W.

Pinero. He had fallen on his feet very luckily, and there was further luck in store for him.

Wilkie Collins, black-bearded, spectacled, dyspeptic, went to Liverpool to see how his play was going. He sat in a dark box, poring over a programme, trying to make out the names of those who were specially good, good enough for the London production of the piece that was to follow. He was making notes to send his London manager.

In the dim light he read Mr. A. W. Pinero's name instead of the name of another actor whose performance he admired. Pinero's name, therefore, went down among those who were to be engaged for the London season. His old comrades of the pit gathered in full force to applaud him and before the end of the year (1876) he had been engaged as a member of Henry Irving's company at the Lyceum. He made his first appearance there as Lord Stanley in *Richard the Second* on the 29th of January 1877.

Now let us go back for a few moments to that evening, just over five years before, which saw the production of *The Bells*. Pinero's career was so curiously intertwined with Irving's, his life was devoted to the same task as that of Irving, their work for the theatre was so much on the same lines and inspired by the same sentiment, that it is worth while to see how the older man's example struck his pupil and how faithfully it was followed.

The English theatre at this period was in a deplorably shabby state. Not quite so squalid as it had been in 1833 when Macaulay wrote to his sister

describing a man named Kenny as "a writer of the class which in our time is at the very bottom of the literary scale. He is a dramatist.

"Most of the farces and three act plays which have succeeded during the last eight or ten years are, I am told," Macaulay went on, "from his pen. Heaven knows that, if they are the farces and plays which I have seen, they do him but little honour. However, this man is one of our great comic writers. He has the merit, such as it is, of hitting the very bad taste of our modern audiences better than any other person who has stooped to that degrading work."

Kenny could have done better. Macaulay had a good deal of talk with him, "thought him a shrewd clever fellow." It was the proprietors, the managers of theatres who played down to the public taste. They went on playing down to it and keeping the theatre out of the main current of the national life until T. W. Robertson managed to get his plays produced and a new phase opened.

"Tea-cup-and-saucer" plays they were nicknamed, because they showed people of the period in the homes of the period and made them behave more or less as such people did behave in real life. The series which began in 1865 with *Society* and ended in 1870 with *M.P.*, including *Ours*, *Caste*, and *School*, were put on the stage by a young couple named Bancroft. They thus began the rescue of the English theatre from its unimportance, its degradingly humble position: as Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft they lived to see that rescue complete.

To the value of their enterprise Pinero paid tribute when he wrote in 1884: " The present advanced condition of the English stage, throwing as it does a clear natural light upon the manners of life and people, where a few years ago, there was nothing but mouthing and tinsel, is due to the crusade begun in the little Prince of Wales's Theatre."

The " clear natural light " must cause amusement to any who have the curiosity to look back at " the conditions of the English stage " in 1884. Pinero in that year had two farces produced, farces which bore no relation whatever to life and manners; he also made an adaptation of Georges Ohnet's *Ironmaster*. However, even these were an improvement on the days before Robertson; they were steps on the road to a drama that should be really a criticism of life.

In 1871, however, there was still almost everything to be done. The drama was shabbily housed; its accessories—scenery, costume, " properties "—were tawdry and mean. It attracted only a very small part of the nation. The man who removed these reproaches was Henry Irving. He was not a great, though he was always an interesting, actor; he was an outstanding, a great personality, and the impress of that personality upon the age began with the production of *The Bells*.

Up to that time he had been known as a clever, eccentric comedian, an impersonator of villains, in plays of no value. With Bateman as his partner, he now rented a large derelict theatre, the Lyceum, and opened it with a piece which depended for its popu-

larity upon the infusion of his vivid temperament into the part of a conscience-stricken murderer.

The Bells was little more than a translation of a French melodrama; then, and for long afterwards, the English theatre borrowed heavily from France. The translator was one Leopold Lewis, a Jewish solicitor who, like Pinero, preferred theatrical to law work. The fame which Irving's magnetic genius won for *The Bells* Lewis claimed for himself, and Irving in his large generous way so far admitted the assertion as to pension him for life. On this and his reflected glory Lewis lived for a great many years, still in old age recounting, as he drank at bars, the story of his "great play."

From the moment when his face appeared, a haunted, haunting face, between the curtains through which his first entrance was made, until the prosperous days at the Lyceum, when he became a prominent figure in the national life, Irving's career was one of triumph. Not of personal triumph alone, but of triumph for the English stage. Irving linked it to the arts of poetry and painting. He raised it from squalor to magnificence. He restored to the actor's calling a dignity it had lacked since the days of Kean and Macready. And he died a poor man because his heart was set, not on personal profit, but on the lifting of the theatre and the actor's art to a level at which they would no longer be looked down on as mere developments from the clowning and horseplay of a village fair.

Whether the social change in the position of actors

has been on the whole a benefit or not is a point that can be argued both ways. But even those who decide that it has not are ready to admit that Irving's life-work, devoted to the improvement and elevation of the stage, had an immediately beneficial effect. There was too much upholstery in the Lyceum productions; " ohs " of admiration from audiences, as the curtain rose on solidly built-up costly " sets," were too eagerly listened for. But the methods which Irving used were the best known in his day. If there had been better, he would have adopted them.

Pinero in a lecture to the Royal Society of Literature has slighted Irving's public spirit. He has said that " Irving's ambition was centred in himself." My acquaintance with Irving was casual, Sir Arthur's friendship was close and intimate. Yet I make bold to suggest that a friend may have missed an aspect which was shown to some outsiders. It is true that Irving " aimed at being acknowledged as the greatest actor of the age and to be hailed as the legitimate successor of Garrick and Kean," but I doubt whether it is true that " he was content to achieve that aim, adding lustre to his calling in the process."

I should say his aim was far wider. His talk certainly gave that impression. He did not appear to be self-centred. He seemed to " covet honour," not solely for his own aggrandizement, but for the art he practised, for the profession to which he belonged. His insistence upon those two words, art and profession, were proof that he had in view a further goal

than the satisfaction of a selfish ambition. His temperament was that of an actor of the old school. He was inclined to be what the French call *cabotin*. He did not himself care twopence whether acting was an art, whether those who acted could correctly be called members of a profession. But he saw how acting and actors would rise in public estimation if these matters were settled in their favour. For that reason he harped upon them whenever the chance occurred.

All the more puzzling becomes Pinero's estimate when we recollect that his life-work was inspired—unconsciously, it would seem—by that of his old chief. He set himself, as soon as he had gained a hearing and was ripe enough to see what he would be at, to lift the character of plays just as Irving had lifted the methods of presenting drama: what moved him was not "ambition centred in himself," but a determination to raise the theatre to a better state than it was in during his early life. As we follow his career, we shall see proof of this resolve over and over again. It is, I am convinced, the key to his strangely fluctuating choice of subjects for plays. What Irving did in one direction, Pinero did in another.

Granville Barker is not an author likely to overpraise one whose manner and material have so little in common with his own. Yet Granville Barker testifies that "Pinero did most to make the theatre of the 'nineties." He must have done it with intent and resolution, not in a fit of absence of mind.

At the point in his life which we have reached, the

point at which he joined Irving's company, a young man who had just come of age, he had no thought of this task in his mind. He was a high-spirited, good-looking young man, quick with his tongue, his eyes roving in search of experience, amusement, information.

" A studious youth who could never be caught lounging," so Ellen Terry described him. " He was always reading or busy in the green room, studying the pictures of past actors or the present realities of actors who came in and out."

That suggests too much a dreamy student. Pinero was never anything but alert. He always had an answer ready, even for " the Chief." He was a privileged jester. No one else in the company was treated so indulgently. Perhaps no one else had the wit to win such indulgence.

He came on to the stage at rehearsal one day wearing a long-haired wig, which his mirror told him suited his face very well. Irving looked at him, stopped rehearsing, walked over to him and said, " Pinero, my boy, that will not do. You must not—er—wear long hair. It was not worn at—er—the period of this play."

" Oh, Mr. Irving," the boy answered, " but at all periods, you know, there have been some men who preferred to wear their hair long," and he looked hard at Irving's own hair which fell over his coat collar at the back.

" Take it off, my boy," Irving said, but he smiled.

There was clearly a good understanding between

the actor becoming famous and the player of small parts; this relation was strengthened by an incident which showed Pinero to be cool and resourceful when a difficulty had to be met.

One evening, during a performance of *Louis XI*, Irving began a long speech with Pinero in attendance as a courtier. Suddenly a stage tree began to rock. It was loose and about to fall. Pinero whispered "The tree is coming down, Sir." Irving paused in his speech and spoke rapidly under his breath.

"Er—hold it up, my boy—er—hold it up," he said. For as long as he could Pinero held the piece of scenery in position without letting the spectators see that anything was wrong. At last, before Irving's long speech ended, it grew too heavy to be held up any longer. Down it came. Irving took no notice. "Er—where is the Dauphin?" he put in, "let us—er—go and see," and he led Pinero off the stage.

Often there was discontent in the company over the ruthless "cutting" of all parts save one. Pinero was as quick to voice a grievance in the theatre as "The Man in the Scotch Cap" had been when he stood outside the pit doors. At a rehearsal Irving saw him sitting on a piece of scenery that stood upright in the wings. Irving said "Get up, my boy, get up. You will cut yourself."

"Oh, that will be all right, Mr. Irving," Pinero replied ruefully, "we are accustomed to having our parts cut in this theatre."

As a satire on the frequency with which all the company was called together for some trifling altera-

tion, only affecting maybe two or three performers, Pinero once put up a notice on the call-board to this effect:

> Call: Twelve o'clock
>
> Mr. Arnot to drive a screw into a flat, and principals and everyone concerned in the production to see him do it.

Mr. Arnot was the property-master. A flat is a piece of scenery.

As an actor Pinero seldom rose above small parts. He once played Sir Peter Teazle at the Haymarket Theatre and drew from a leading critic the dry comment that he " showed at least confidence in his own powers." He played the King in *Hamlet* at Birmingham, and was told by a frank writer in a local newspaper that he was the worst Claudius the city had ever seen. But has anyone in any age been good as Claudius?

Percy FitzGerald in one of his theatrical books said that Pinero the successful dramatist had been " an obscure painstaking actor." That did him less than justice. Ellen Terry put it more kindly, and at the same time more fairly, when she wrote: " Consummate care, precision and brain characterized his work as an actor always. He was especially good," she added, " in the silly ass type of part," such as Osric or Roderigo, " and no one could say of him that he was playing himself."

He was by general agreement a sound "utility" actor with ideas of his own (for example, the long-haired wig !) and a fair command of the means to express them. He considers that he established one theatrical record—by playing two of the very worst parts in Shakespeare—Guildenstern in *Hamlet* and Salarino in *The Merchant of Venice* for the longest consecutive runs those plays have ever had. He can still remember acutely the agony of standing still for thirty-five minutes during the Trial Scene, without speaking a word.

Irving seldom made friends with the actors he employed. Not until he had ceased to act did Pinero come into close personal touch with the man apart from the employer. He had a strong regard for Irving and—at that time—a strong admiration for his work. In 1883 after the performance of *Much Ado About Nothing*, which was hailed as the high-water mark of Shakespearean production, Pinero wrote to Irving:

"I think the work at your theatre does so much to create playgoers—which is what we want far more, I fancy, than we want new theatres and perhaps new plays."

It was Pinero who wrote the address presented to Irving by the theatrical professions when he was knighted, the first actor to receive that distinction, in 1895. In a letter of gratitude Irving said: "Your most beautiful address touched me to the heart. Thanks, and thanks again, old friend. I shall never forget it."

The next year Pinero happened to use his title in writing to him: Irving at once remonstrated.

"If I am Sir Henry any more, I shall have to address you as Field-Marshal."

Irving was deeply touched again when during an illness of his Pinero offered to rehearse for him any new production he might be contemplating. The offer was not accepted, but only because no new piece was produced.

Irving often said, after Pinero had made his name, that he would like to be seen in a piece by him. He got so far as to announce, in 1895, that during the next season he would stage a Pinero play. But Pinero never managed to write one for him.

"I felt about the Chief," he told me once, "as a schoolboy feels, after he has grown up, about his head master. I simply could not imagine the Chief acting in any play of mine. The idea overcame me!"

CHAPTER TWO

COMMENCING AUTHOR

"Thoughtful and conscientious with artistic aims."—WILLIAM ARCHER *on Pinero's early work.*

IT was, however, Irving who gave the young actor in his company the earliest encouragement he had as a playwright.

Pinero's very first production was a little piece called *Two Hundred a Year.* It was performed at the benefit of a friend of his, F. H. Macklin, afterwards prominent at the Lyceum. Macklin gave him a set of shirt-studs to remember it by. Soon after this Pinero wrote Irving a letter, offering to supply a "curtain-raiser" for the Lyceum if one should be required. For some time no notice was taken of the offer, then one day Irving stopped Pinero and said: "If you like to write me a little piece for—er—next season I will give you—er—fifty pounds for it."

Three "little pieces" Pinero wrote for the Lyceum, acting in each of them himself and drawing from Irving the prophecy that "if he went on—er—as he had—er begun, he would be sure to take—er—a good position as a dramatic author."

It was *Daisy's Escape* which drew from "the Chief" that commendation. This was played after *The Bells*, which had a farce in front of it: the theatre gave

playgoers a good deal for their money in those days. It was about a girl who found herself in a railway accident with a young man whom she had promised to marry but had discovered she disliked. Pinero played the undesirable suitor himself.

In 1880 two events marked progress for Pinero as author and as actor too. A two-act piece of his called *The Money Spinner* was put on at the St. James's, a leading theatre then as now, with a cast including the Kendals, John Clayton, and John Hare. About the same time he decided to leave the Lyceum to take up a better position at the Haymarket under Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft. With them he stayed until in a year or two he found himself able to leave the stage and give all his time to writing. He made his last appearance as Sir Anthony Absolute in *The Rivals*. In a farewell letter to the Bancrofts he expressed the feeling that was common to all whom they employed:

" In one's early days," he wrote, " what is known as ' sentiment in business ' flourished poorly. In the Haymarket Theatre the actor's willingness to do as much as he can for his managers is outmatched by his managers' anxiety to do more for the actor. I carry away with me a regard for you both, quite unbusinesslike, but which I am glad to acknowledge, always and everywhere."

None congratulated the young actor on his success with *The Money-Spinner* more warmly than the Bancrofts, his employers. It was the first effort of his which pointed to possibilities out of reach of the hack

playwright. The piece was undeniably good stage-craft; principally that. But there were moments in it which lifted it a little out of the ordinary.

It told how a young wife cheated at cards so that she might pay off a sum which her husband had stolen. Her dexterity was not an isolated slip. Her father, a gambling-house keeper, had forced her and her sister to help him fleece its frequenters. Not a sympathetic story, but one which compelled interest, and a spice of sympathy too, as Pinero set it forth.

The only character not more or less of a knave was the young Englishman who was cheated by the "money-spinner"; so the young wife had been nicknamed by reason of her cleverness; and he was more or less of a fool. A good-hearted fool, however; he forgave the fraud practised on him as soon as he knew what had prompted it.

Pinero said long afterwards that he believed the materials for English drama could only be looked for in his day in the upper ranks of Society. He abandoned this belief it is true. Two of his most popular plays, *His House in Order* and *The Thunder Bolt*, were labelled most distinctly "middle-class." But for a number of years he felt it necessary to make his characters, or at any rate to sprinkle them with, members of the titled, landed, and official classes. This young Englishman in *The Money-Spinner* was a peer.

In *The Squire* which made a stir twelve months afterwards there were no characters above the rank of a parson and an army officer. This was the first

Photo by Window & Grove]

DAME MADGE KENDAL

whose acting helped to win favour for several of Pinero's early plays.

piece in which Pinero set before himself the ideal which he followed steadily from this time onward—to hold the mirror up to nature.

" To show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

No other author writing at this date made any such attempt. Playwrights were down again " at the very bottom of the literary scale."

" We in England," Matthew Arnold had just written, " have no modern drama at all." (This was in his famous plea for a State and municipal theatre.) He thought that " our vast society is not at present homogeneous enough for this—not sufficiently united, even any large portion of it, in a common view of life, a common ideal, capable of serving as basis for a modern English drama."

Yet Arnold saw that the theatre was beginning " to exercise upon us a great attraction." Not only was there an increased liking for it in the upper class and in the working class, " the attraction of the theatre begins to be felt again, after a long interval of insensibility, by the middle class also."

" Our French friends would say that this class, long petrified in a narrow Protestantism and in a perpetual reading of the Bible, is beginning at last to grow conscious of the horrible unnaturalness and ennui of its life, and is seeking to escape from it."

Inspired by a visit which the Comédie Française Company had paid to London, Arnold urged that we should " organize the theatre " so that a modern

drama of our own might spring up amongst us. That there was no modern drama he stated as a fact incontrovertible. At that date, to class writers for the stage with novelists would have been considered ridiculous—if anyone had been rash enough to make the comparison. To speak of plays then being written as a branch of literature would not even have been thought amusing; it would have been frowned at as a bad joke.

W. S. Gilbert, it is true, had been writing plays for ten years, but they were most of them in blank verse and in the nature of parables. As a serious dramatist he failed. His most ambitious effort did not run more than two weeks.

He felt sore about this. One night at the Beefsteak Club he was giving an outline of the plot (the piece was a treatment of the Faust legend called *Gretchen*) and one of the company, finding him a trifle tedious, interrupted him with:

"How did it end?"

"Oh," said Gilbert acidly, "it ended in a fortnight."

He was in 1881 just beginning with Sullivan the series of operettas called after the Savoy Theatre where most of them were produced. There he found scope for his real gift of sarcastic humour, for the caustic demonstration that everyone was absurd, all professions comic in their inflated pretensions, all the great ones of the earth—Lord Chancellors, Major-Generals, First Lords of the Admiralty, Kings, Emperors, policemen, politicians—figures of pantomime.

Even fairies and spectres were made by him to appear in a ridiculous light. It was an odd, entertaining fate which endowed this severely respectable Victorian barrister and country gentleman (that is what he was in private life) with a passion for poking fun at everything and made him one of the chief forces for the breaking-up of the social system which he belonged to and revered.

Without Gilbert's wit or sense of form and phrasing, H. J. Byron relied on rollicking spirits and on silly puns to make his farces popular. How popular some of them were, too! *Our Boys* ran for four and a quarter years at the little Vaudeville Theatre in the Strand. It had human elements in it. No piece could win such favour without something in it to move the springs of sympathy or laughter. But it was the poorest stuff. It told the familiar tale of a " vulgar " family brought into contact with a " superior " one. The " vulgar " papa had only to mention " inferior Dosset " (he had made his money in the provision trade), or to drop an h, to set the audience rocking with laughter.

Yet this was the most lifelike of all Byron's farces, and when he tried to write a serious play he plunged into more fantastic absurdities than ever. In *Cyril's Success* which he wrote as a reply to those who persisted in terming him " droll or punster," and which he called a comedy, he was not above naming a character " the Hon. Frederick Titeboy."

James Albery's play *Two Roses* did for him what *Our Boys* did for Byron. It made him prosperous and

prominent among playwrights. But he wrote nothing else that held the stage for any time. William Archer attributed his ill-success to laziness. He would not take the trouble to master his craft. Dumas the younger advised playwrights to "write their last acts first." Then they would know what they were leading up to. The earlier acts would go direct to the goal. That might give rather a mechanical result. But it would surely turn out better than did Albery's plan of writing a first act without having any idea of what was to come after.

F. C. Burnand, afterwards editor of *Punch* for many years, was also writing for the stage in 1881; his work was, if possible, of a lower quality than that of Byron and Albery. Tom Taylor wrote dreary historical pieces in blank verse, almost incredibly bad. W. G. Wills was turning out smooth poetic dramas with the facility of a sausage-machine, and when Tennyson's name was in the Lyceum bill as author instead of Wills's (a clever device of Irving's to prove acting an art and a profession) it was hard to tell the difference between either their plots or their versification.

Tennyson was the only man of letters at that time for whom the theatre seemed to have any attraction —attraction enough at any rate to make the studying of theatrical conditions appear worth while. Swinbourne wrote a play, a play which it would have taken a week to act! He made his characters talk for two hundred lines or more at a time. He did not understand that people will not sit for two and a half

or three hours at a stretch, on an uncomfortable seat with limited space for legs, to listen to mere words. They must have action to occupy their minds and make them forget their discomfort. The action may take place on the stage, or it may go on in their imaginations, their intellects: there must be movement, movement, movement all the time.

Few poets or novelists do understand this. George Meredith did not. He was dallying with a comedy at this time. It was edited by J. M. Barrie and Charles Frohman put it on in 1910, when he started a Repertory Theatre in London with the determination to make it prove that " repertory was all bunk." *The Sentimentalists* consisted of nothing but wire-drawn dialogue with very little wit in it. Granville Barker has extravagantly praised it, has declared that "something was very wrong with a theatre which could not profit by it." That may explain why Barker, after *The Voysey Inheritance*, failed time after time to write an actable play.

Stevenson might have been a dramatist if he had not really preferred to write novels. He and Henley were planning and jotting down *Deacon Brodie* and *Admiral Guinea* about the time when *The Squire* was produced. These pieces are infinitely more alive than Meredith's tinkling ghost-play. The talk has a tang in it. There are speeches with a fine swing. But to be a writer of plays demands a long apprenticeship; calls for qualities of industry, patience, almost mathematical skill, which few writers in other walks of literature possess.

Above all the dramatist must be able to put himself in the spectator's place, he must know when his play drags, when the motives which influence his characters are obscure. He must not only desire to reproduce some aspect of life as he sees it; he must train himself to do this by long and often disappointing toil.

In *Trelawny of the Wells* there is a scene that shows what Tom Robertson (in the play *Tom Wrench*) aimed at doing when he began to write. It serves also to tell us what Pinero himself aimed at. Imogen asks Tom why he doesn't try to write a play. "Try?" he echoes sarcastically. "I am doing more than try to write plays. I *am* writing plays. I have *written* plays. My cupboard upstairs is choked with 'em."

IMOGEN

Won't any one take a fancy?

TOM

Not a sufficiently violent fancy.

IMOGEN

You know the speeches were so short and had such ordinary words in them in the plays you used to read me, no big opportunity for the leading lady.

TOM

M'yes. I strive to make my people talk and behave like live people, don't I?

IMOGEN. [*Vaguely*]

I suppose you do.

TOM

To fashion heroes out of actual dull, everyday men—the sort of men you see smoking cheroots in the club windows in St. James's Street, and heroines from simple maidens in muslin frocks. Naturally the managers won't stand that.

IMOGEN

Why, of course not.

TOM

If *they* did, the public wouldn't.

IMOGEN

Is it likely?

TOM

Is it likely? I wonder.

IMOGEN

Wonder? What?

TOM

Whether they would.

To "make his people talk and behave like live people"—that has been Pinero's endeavour, even in his most sentimental comedies, even in farce. Also to make the rooms in which they lived like real rooms. Robertson had tried to do that. "I won't have doors stuck here, there and everywhere," Tom Wrench declared, "no, nor windows in all sorts of impossible places."

He would have "windows on one side, doors on the other—just where they should be—architecturally. And locks on the doors, real locks to work and handles—to turn! Ha, ha! You wait—wait!"

For such fidelity to the actual it was necessary to wait a long time! Actors continued for many years to stride off the stage pushing the door away from them with ample gesture, in spite of the fact that doors of rooms open inwards, not outwards. Rooms continued to have doors "here, there and everywhere." It was not till Pinero got into his stride

that the reforms Tom Robertson ached for could be said to have won the fight against lazy, careless work backed by a slovenly tradition. In his play-writing as in his acting Pinero was always distinguished by "consummate care, precision, and brains."

He had to struggle against many disadvantages, internal and external both. His reading had been restricted, his school education narrow. He had little acquaintance with life and manners outside the sphere of his upbringing. He was as completely cut off from the humble workers as he was from the wealthy, the learned, the fashionable. The worlds of art, sport, politics, with which a dramatist like Galsworthy was familiar from childhood, were as far from the Old Kent Road solicitor's son as was the world of manual toil.

When he did overcome these obstacles he found fresh ones in the dullness of theatre-goers, their dislike of innovation, their attachment to the usual. He had to travel slowly. Eight years after the time at which we have now arrived he was obliged to alter the ending of *The Profligate* in deference to the public distaste for anything but "happiness ever after." Little wonder that *The Squire*, after starting well, came to a tame and hackneyed finish, in accord with the dramatic principles of 1881. One of the strongest of these principles was that inconvenient characters ought always to be removed, either by accident or by some convenient disease.

This was the author's rough note of the idea on which the drama is based:

"The notion of a young couple secretly married—the girl about to become a mother—finding that a former wife is still in existence. The heroine amongst those who respect and love her. The fury of a rejected lover who believes her to be a guilty woman. Two men face to face at night-time. Query—Kill the first wife?"

Here is an idea certainly—an idea which, treated in a serious and original manner, would no doubt make an interesting play. It is true that men are not, as a rule, in doubt whether their wives are alive or not. The device is of the stage, stagey. However, something must be granted to the dramatist. No one need grudge Mr. Pinero his postulate. The grudge which we do bear against him is not for starting with an improbable situation, but for handling that situation in an insincere, nerveless fashion. The first act is wonderfully good. The exposition of the theme is masterly. We are interested in the characters. We feel that the situation is big with all kinds of possibilities. Then comes the scene in which the young husband and wife learn that they are not legally married, that between them stands the previous wife, supposed honestly by both of them to be dead. In this scene, you will remember, the husband is concealed behind a curtain. He has come in by the window while his rival is telling the story.

This is the moment that brings us to the parting of the ways. Up to now the play has been full of interest, original, sincere. This is the crux upon which all the rest turns. When the teller of the sad story has

gone, will the husband come out at once from behind the curtain and act as a man would in such circumstances, or will he remain hidden while his wife has a scene all to herself, and then appear and behave like a stage puppet? It is a moment of breathless excitement.

Unfortunately, the playwright was not strong enough to follow the bolder course. The solution took the wrong turn, insincerity laid hold upon the play, and the rest of it is mere artifice—conventional drama of the depressing period of the early 'eighties.

The difference between the first act, so full of power and dexterity, and the last, with its comic-opera peasants and lingering *dénouement*, is truly pathetic. The final scenes are really no more than tedious devices to keep the story afloat until, upon the stroke of eleven, the death of the inconvenient first wife can be whispered and the curtain fall upon a fresh prospect of wedding bells.

"Query—Kill the first wife?" Alas, the same malady which carried off the first wife proved fatal to the last act. What was the reason? Did Mr. Pinero say to himself, "*Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor*"? or was it simply that he had not yet the force of mind to break with the commonplace? The latter, I fancy. He arrived slowly at his full mental stature. In 1881 he was only in his intellectual teens. Besides, there was no one in 1881 to show the way to better things.

The piece is said to have owed much of its success to Mrs. Kendal. Of this I must leave my elders to

speak. I have no doubt her beautiful art filled the piece with the fragrance of womanhood, and gave poignancy to the passion and tenderness which Chance had so sorely betrayed. I have only seen Miss Kate Rorke in the part of Kate Verity. She made a charming "squire," certainly, but she was gracefully pathetic rather than powerful in the emotional scenes.

It is difficult, by the way, to believe that the people who made a fuss about the points of resemblance between *The Squire* and Mr. Hardy's great novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, can have either read the book or seen the play. The superficial likeness between Kate and Bathsheba is their only point of contact. The rural setting, which was to waft "the scent of the hay across the footlights," was surely common property among novelists and playwrights.

Hardy was much disturbed by the fear that his domain was being trespassed on. He produced, with Comyns Carr, a dramatic version of the novel while *The Squire* was running. It had not the substance or the skill of Pinero's piece. It ran a very short while.

After *The Squire* Mr. William Archer described Mr. Pinero (*English Dramatists of To-day*, Sampson Low, 1882) as "a thoughtful and conscientious writer with artistic aims, if not yet with full command of his artistic means." Mr. Archer found in Mr. Pinero's work "sufficient promise to warrant a hope that we have in this author a playwright of genuine talent, whose more mature work will take a prominent and honourable place upon the stage in coming years."

CHAPTER THREE

A NEW FARCE FORMULA

"Pinero struck a new vein of purely English humour at a moment when the public was wearying of adaptations of doubtful French farces, and he worked it with consummate skill."—R. FARQUHARSON SHARP *in his "Short History of the English Stage."*

THE SQUIRE, like the *Money-Spinner*, suggested that Mr. Pinero's talent would develop upon the lines of the serious drama. But for this development we had to wait a good many years—until the production of *The Profligate*, in fact, in 1889. The interval, however, was well occupied; it brought forth what many good judges still hold to be the most characteristic fruit of the author's pen.

Between 1885 and 1887 were produced, at the Court Theatre, the three farces—*The Magistrate*, *The Schoolmistress*, and *Dandy Dick*—that gave Mr. Pinero at once a leading place amongst the dramatic writers of the time. In 1889 followed *The Cabinet Minister* and in 1893 *The Amazons*, constructed on much the same lines. In this delightful series of farces, and in the Savoy operettas, we have the only two original dramatic art forms which England can claim to have evolved during the nineteenth century. As regards all other forms, we have followed; here, we led.

When he wrote this series of what we may call the Court farces, Mr. Pinero recreated the farce of character. The farce of intrigue had, in 1885, long

held the stage unchallenged. It was almost always of French extraction. *Pink Dominoes* was typical of the breed. "From the French" was all too familiar on English theatrical programmes. Parisian improprieties were toned down; enough remained, however, to suggest even worse things than had been in the original and sometimes to make the plot scarce intelligible. This order of farce Pinero drove from the English-speaking stage.

He had tried his own hand at it before he hit upon his later vein of pure ore. He had worked over a good many French plays. In this kind the author's figures are but puppets who move according as he pulls their strings. The plot has them in an iron grip. They do not build up the story on natural lines as they go along. They are dolls used for the convenient presentment of some one comic idea.

There are no surprises, no sudden turns of merriment in the farce of intrigue. You see exactly how it will reach its appointed end, just as you watch a train coming smoothly along upon its appointed set of rails, switching off correctly at the points, turning awkward corners with easy assurance. In *The Rocket* and *In Chancery* Mr. Pinero's puppets were more lifelike than most, but they were really no more than lay figures cleverly constructed for the purposes of a ramified plot.

His later work was very different. In the Court series the characters live and move and have their being quite apart from the demands of the plot. Indeed, they themselves and their idiosyncrasies *are* the plot.

It was a bold experiment to set about amusing audiences which included so many admirers of magistrates and deans and cabinet ministers and schoolmistresses by showing them these high and mighty personages in absurd and undignified situations, by turning upon them the high-lights of satire and ridicule. Yet this was the leading motive of each play—to make fun of various types of modern character by creating real people, exhibiting them in their actual surroundings, making them act in a highly improbable, yet just possible way.

It required a good deal of wit and a great deal of tact to do this without arousing annoyance and resentment. Both ingredients were supplied by Mr. Pinero in just proportion. His wit made everyone laugh, and when you can make people laugh they cannot, even if they would, continue to be angry with you. When you hear complaint that a playwright has made fun of this or that institution—the Church, or the Law, or the Army, or Marriage, or Divorce—it simply means that he has not been funny enough, or that he has been funny on wrong lines.

Mr. Pinero had both wit enough to be funny and tact enough to keep him upon the right lines. The Dean in *Dandy Dick*, for instance, is so real in essence, so unreal in action that no one could be offended. He is a real person, but he is doing for the moment what a real person would never do.

This is one of the conventions between the writers of farce and the spectator. The characters of farce should be as real as their creator can

make them, but they must not act as real people would act.

If we could imagine an impecunious dean suddenly discovering that money could be made by betting upon horses, commissioning his butler to back a horse for him, making a bran mash for the animal in his anxiety that it shall run well, administering it himself and then being arrested on suspicion of trying to poison a starter on the eve of a race—if this were really the playwright's suggestion, the only play to be made on such a theme would have to be a very serious play—almost a tragedy in fact.

But, in this case, it is the very incongruity of the idea that sets our minds at rest, and upon this basis of incongruity Mr. Pinero built up each of his famous farces.

No magistrate we know would allow his larky stepson to take him to a fast supper and gambling establishment just about to be raided by the police; no schoolmistress we know would spend her Christmas holidays figuring as a queen of comic opera; no Cabinet Minister and his wife would be likely to act as Sir Julian and Lady Twombley act; it is highly improbable that any dean would behave like the Dean of St. Marvell's, however much he wanted money for his cathedral spire. Yet, of course, it is just possible that any of these things might happen; we can just imagine it; and that is where the fun comes in.

When people behave on the stage, as, considering their characters they could never by any possibility

behave in real life, they fail to awaken our interest. This is what weakens melodrama and all plays based on a purposeless sacrifice or an idiotic refusal to take a natural straightforward course. But we can all be interested in improbable incongruous actions so long as they are logically led up and so long as we know that the playwright is enjoying the joke too.

The persons in farce, then, should always act in character. They may do improbable things, but they must not do altogether impossible things. The immense superiority of Mr. Pinero's farces to others even of their kind lies in his observance of these rules and in the solidity of his central characters. He has drawn them with so sure a hand that they remain real people in spite of the unreality of their actions. They would never behave as they do, but they do it so naturally that we are almost convinced in spite of ourselves.

M. Brunetière, I know, has defined farce as the spectacle of a human will striving towards some end and meeting with some obstacle such as the irony of chance, or ridiculous prejudice, or a want of proportion between means and end. But then M. Brunetière bases his whole theory of drama upon what Stevenson called the struggle between adverse wills "coming nobly to the grapple."

"Ce que nous demandons au théâtre, c'est le spectacle d'une volonté qui se déploie en tendant vers un but et qui a conscience de la nature des moyens qu'elle y fait servir."

Thus, when the obstacles to a human will are insurmountable, as Destiny, Providence, a law of nature or a grand passion, we have Tragedy.

When there is a chance of overcoming the obstacles, as in the case of a strong social convention or prejudice, or a passion not quite of the grand order, we have Drama or Romantic Drama.

When two adverse wills conflict one with the other we have Comedy.

And when, as I have already said, the obstacle to will is found in the irony of chance, or ridiculous prejudice, or a want of proportion between means and end, then, according to M. Brunetière's classification, we have Farce.

It seems impertinent to offer to disagree with so eminent a man of letters, but I cannot help thinking that, so far at any rate as Comedy and Farce are concerned, M. Brunetière's definition scarcely covers the whole ground.

"Comedy," according to George Meredith, "is a game played to throw reflections upon social life." Now there are ways of throwing reflections upon social life which are not based altogether upon a conflict of wills; and there is also a certain farcical incongruity of which M. Brunetière takes no account. Apply his test to the Pinero farces. They are all quite outside its scope. May we not say that there is a distinct form of farce which is based entirely upon incongruity, and arouses merriment by appealing to that sense of the unfitness of things which lies so near the root of Humour?

The difference between Comedy and Farce, then, is, I would submit, this. Comedy shows us possible people doing probable things. Farce shows us possible people doing improbable things. Thus, *The School for Scandal* is comedy; *She Stoops to Conquer* is farce; *The Relapse* trenches upon farce; *The Comedy of Errors* is farce; *The Country Wife* is farce; while *Love for Love*, and indeed all Congreve's plays, may justly be called comedy.

Put it another way and we get almost the same result. Comedy depends more upon wit, farce more upon humour. Comedy keeps us smiling. Farce sets us on to laugh, and this is done with the greatest success when it is founded upon some incongruity which is seen at once by all the world to be an incongruity.

Of course there are farces which depend upon wit rather than humour; such are the plays of Bernard Shaw and the plays of Mr. Frederick Lonsdale. These would be comedies if the characters were possible people. Mr. Shaw's wit is so spontaneous that he almost persuades us his characters are real. But really they are only so many Bernard Shaw's in disguise. Mr. Lonsdale's creations are a shade more lifelike; his wit, on the other hand, is more mechanical. He brings forth things new and old out of a well-stored note-book. Too often his fireworks seem to have been left out in the rain.

Then, again, there is the farce of intrigue, and lately to that has succeeded the farce of misunderstanding. These, as a rule, depend neither upon

wit nor upon humour, but upon a large number of doors and upon the rapidity with which the actors are able to get through their lines. In neither kind is any attempt made to draw character or to display the fruits of observation, or even to make fun of the passing follies of the hour. They are born old-fashioned; they leap from their authors' brains fully armed with japes which have done service so long that the mind of man runneth not back to the contrary. Thespis must have joked so in his cart, and the clowns of an earlier age have clowned it not otherwise.

Of the two orders I think the farce of intrigue is preferable. Here there is really something to be concealed. The husband really has deceived his wife, the young man has actually married the cook or the artist's model. In the other there is no reality at all. The whole thing is a mistake. No one has done anything wrong at all, and you wish all the time that someone would be sane enough to say so and end the play. But they do not even pretend to be sane. They are merely impossible people doing impossible things.

Mr. Pinero, then, brought back to life the farce of character, the farce based upon incongruity, the farce which shows us in the most light-hearted and entertaining fashion, possible people doing improbable things. To understand how witty and observant these pieces are, how genuine the humour which inspired them, they need to be read as well as seen on the stage. Anyone who can read them with-

out being amused must be like Mr. Fraser of Locheen who had never learnt to laugh. And then consider what unspeakable torture it would be to be obliged to read the ordinary farce or light comedy which passes muster with the average audience.

Of the first three farces *Dandy Dick* is, I should say, the best, considered all round. The character is more developed and riper, and the situations grow naturally out of the idiosyncrasies of the dramatis personae. *The Magistrate* is, perhaps, more mirth-provoking, but the fun is more forced than in *Dandy Dick*. There are signs here and there of a determination to get a laugh at any cost, and, when you come to think it over, the idea of the young man nearly twenty passing as a schoolboy of fourteen is not very delicately worked out.

There is no need to dwell upon this, but I cannot help feeling that Cis Farringdon's relations with his mother's friends and maid-servants might have been touched upon, if it was necessary to touch upon them at all, with a lighter hand. However, this affects very little of the play, which is full of uproarious humour from beginning to end. It is interesting to observe that Charlotte Verrinder is, as it were, a first sketch of the inimitable "George Tid" in *Dandy Dick*. You see it in this very funny conversation between Charlotte and her sister, Mrs. Posket, in the first act.

AGATHA

Now, we can tell each other our miseries undisturbed. Will you begin?

SIR ARTHUR PINERO

as Sir Anthony Absolute in his acting days. A drawing by the famous Phil May.

CHARLOTTE

Well, at last I am engaged to Captain Horace Vale.

AGATHA

Oh, Charley! I'm so glad.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, so is he, he says. He proposed to me at the Hunt Ball—in the passage—Tuesday week.

AGATHA

What did he say?

CHARLOTTE

He said, " By Jove, I love you awfully."

AGATHA

Well, and what did you say?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, I said, " Well, if you're going to be as eloquent as all that, by Jove, I can't stand out." So we settled it in the passage. He bars flirting till after we're married. That's my misery. What's yours, Aggy?

AGATHA

Something awful.

CHARLOTTE

Cheer up, Aggy! What is it?

AGATHA

Well, Charley, you know, I lost my poor dear first husband at a very delicate age.

CHARLOTTE

Well, you were five-and-thirty, dear.

AGATHA

Yes, that's what I mean. Five-and-thirty is a very delicate age to find yourself single. You're neither one thing nor the other. You're not exactly a two-year-old, and you don't care to pull a hansom. However, I soon met Mr. Posket at Spa—bless him!

CHARLOTTE

And you nominated yourself for the Matrimonial Stakes.

Mr. Farringdon's The Widow, by Bereavement, out of Mourning, ten pounds extra.

AGATHA

Yes, Charley, and in less than a month I went triumphantly over the course. But, Charley dear, I didn't carry the fair weight for age—and that's my trouble.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, dear!

AGATHA

Undervaluing Æneas's love, in a moment of, I hope, not unjustifiable vanity, I took five years from my total, which made me thirty-one on my wedding morning.

CHARLOTTE

Well, my dear, many a misguided woman has done that before you.

AGATHA

Yes, Charley, but don't you see the consequences? It has thrown everything out. As I am now thirty-one instead of thirty-six, as I ought to be, it stands to reason that I couldn't have been married twenty years ago, which I was. So I have had to fib in proportion.

CHARLOTTE

I see—making your first marriage occur only fifteen years ago.

AGATHA

Exactly.

CHARLOTTE

Well, then, dear, why worry yourself further?

AGATHA

Why, dear, don't you see? If I am only thirty-one now, my boy couldn't have been born nineteen years ago, and, if he could, he oughtn't to have been, because, on my own showing, I wasn't married till four years later. Now you see the result!

CHARLOTTE

Which is that that fine strapping young gentleman over there is only fourteen.

AGATHA

Precisely. Isn't it awkward? And his moustache is becoming more and more obvious every day.

CHARLOTTE

What does the boy himself believe?

AGATHA

He believes his mother, of course, as a boy should. As a prudent woman I kept him in ignorance of his age in case of necessity. But it is terribly hard on the poor child, because his aims, instincts and ambitions are all so horribly in advance of his condition. His food, his books, his amusements are out of keeping with his palate, his brain and his disposition; and with all this suffering, his wretched mother has the remorseful consciousness of having shortened her offspring's life.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, come, you haven't quite done that.

AGATHA

Yes, I have, because, if he lives to be a hundred, he must be buried at ninety-five.

Lady Tree, by the way, played Charlotte for a time, while Beerbohm Tree was the Mr. Posket in place of Arthur Cecil. That was the only Pinero part Tree played.

The Schoolmistress is wilder farce than either *The Magistrate* or *Dandy Dick*, but the wit of the dialogue and the neatness of the characterization remove it far away from anything like the rough-and-tumble variety of comic drama. Vere Queckett is a genuine creation. There is much more of him in the piece than of the Schoolmistress herself, who, unless Mrs. John Wood had played the part, would have been almost a secondary character. But Vere would make

up for any number of shortcomings. The contrast between the "immense pomposity of his sesquipedalian verbiage" and the utter insignificance of his person and character is delicious. His description of the small lark-pie which was ordered for eight persons is irresistible. The pie is "architecturally disproportionate." His excuse for fibbing could not be improved upon: "A habit of preparing election manifestoes for various members of my family has impaired a fervent admiration for truth, in which I yield to no man."

As a foil to Vere we have Admiral Rankling, the man of action, the Admiral who is distinguished "because his ship has never run into anything," the man of few words, who, in reply to the letter which tells him of his daughter's engagement, telegraphs the single word "Bosh!" Peggy Hesslerigge, the articled pupil, is a delightful little creature. Every line of the part recalls with pathetic force the personality of Miss Rose Norreys.

Sheba in *Dandy Dick* was another character which this young actress played with delicious humour. The scenes between the Dean's daughters and the eccentric officers who make love to them are a long way below the rest of the play both in verisimilitude and in humour, but Miss Norreys carried them off triumphantly by the dainty charm of her art. The Dean himself, his sporting sister, "George Tid," Sir Tristram Mardon and butler Blore are each perfect; the constable and his wife are scarcely less. When you think of *The Magistrate*, your memory

goes back to situations—to the raid on the gambling establishment, or the confronting of the unlucky Mr. Posket on the bench with his wife and his sister-in-law in the dock. When you recall *The Schoolmistress* it is the laughable ingenuity of the plot that chiefly occurs to you, the piling-up of misadventures and misunderstandings, and the gradual closing of the net around poor Queckett. But in *Dandy Dick* it is the people themselves whom we remember and over whose peculiarities we smile. The plot we almost forget, but the characters stand out clear and distinct in recollection. They are like people we have known rather better than we know the most of our acquaintances in real life. The two Army officers are, of course, exaggerated, but their elements are real. The "regular, pure, simple English Evening at Home," to which they are asked to contribute music ("there's nothing like it in any other country," Georgiana observes) is but legitimate satire and capital fun. In the American production, by the way, the bilious Major Tarver accompanied Darbey's violin solo with a flute *obbligato*, instead of being a singer and finding that his songs had been lost on the way.

This was one of the few instances of alterations being permitted in Pinero plays. As a rule the author resolutely forbade changes. The custom of pulling pieces about to suit local performers or local tastes revolted his self-respect. When it was proposed that the famous Ada Rehan should play the boy in *The Magistrate* he refused absolutely, though it was cus-

tomary at that period for smart young men parts to be taken by actresses. He declined also to allow a French adapter to turn this piece into a wild welter of smut and senselessness. He was determined to make play-writing, so far as he was concerned, a decent, serious occupation. Every possible effort was made to get his " atmospheres " right. Thus, a performance of *Dandy Dick* was given for persons connected with the turf: all present—racehorse owners, trainers, jockeys—agreed that the farce avoided all technical mistakes.

The whole play coheres so admirably, is all so much of a piece, that one can single out no particular scenes for special commendation. It is the general effect that leaves its impression upon the spectator's mind. Yet I shold like to quote one scene, both for its own sake and also to establish the relationship between Charley Verrinder and Georgiana Tidman. Sir Tristram Mardon and " George Tid " have just succeeded in rescuing the Dean from the ferocious village constable, Noah Topping.

GEORGIANA

But, oh! Tris Mardon, what can I ever say to you?

SIR TRISTRAM

Anything you like, except " Thank you."

GEORGIANA

Don't stop me! Why, you were the man who hauled Augustin out of the cart by his legs!

SIR TRISTRAM

Oh, but why mention such trifles?

GEORGIANA

They're not trifles. And when his cap fell off, it was you, brave fellow that your are, who pulled the horse's nose-bag over my brother's head so that he shouldn't be recognized.

SIR TRISTRAM

My dear Georgiana, these are the common courtesies of everyday life.

GEORGIANA

They are acts which any true woman would esteem. Gus won't readily forget the critical moment when all the chaff ran down the back of his neck—nor shall I.

SIR TRISTRAM

Nor shall I forget the way in which you gave Dandy his whisky out of a soda-water bottle just before the race.

GEORGIANA

That's nothing—any lady would do the same.

SIR TRISTRAM

Nothing! You looked like the Florence Nightingale of the paddock. Oh, Georgiana, why, why, why won't you marry me?

GEORGIANA

Why!

SIR TRISTRAM

Why?

GEORGIANA

Why! Because you've only just asked me, Tris!

SIR TRISTRAM

But when I touched your hand last night you reared.

GEORGIANA

Yes, Tris, old man, but love is founded on mutual esteem. Last night you hadn't put my brother's head in that nose-bag.

Mrs. John Wood was, of course, thoroughly at home as Georgiana. But the part is not one that plays itself, as so many of Mr. Pinero's women's parts

do. Miss Ada Rehan was not a success in it in America, and when *Dandy Dick* was revived in 1900 at Wyndham's Theatre, Miss Violet Vanbrugh failed to get into the character the right touch of good-hearted loudness which is Mrs. Wood's particular gift. Miss Marie Löhr in 1930 was completely successful. From the moment of her appearance in the Dean's drawing-room she got a laugh with every speech. She indicated very ingeniously, too, the gradual increase of womanly charm over horsiness and masculinity as her affection for Sir Tristram grew. Mr. Nigel Playfair's Dean was another triumph. After thirty-three years the piece, costumed in its own period, came out fresh and full of fun.

Three years after *Dandy Dick* came *The Cabinet Minister*, another triumph for Mrs. John Wood, another popular success, but not another comic masterpiece like its predecessor. In this piece Pinero departed a little way from his farce formula. He allowed sentiment to creep in. "The audience," said a critic of the day, "found itself laughing at seemingly serious situations which it felt should properly provoke tears; feeling sympathetically interested in passages of sentiment one moment, only to mock at them the next, and in fact experiencing constant perplexity as to emotional duties. The programme said 'farce,' yet here was actual drama with a whimsical twist that was most surprising, here were bits of pathos which were positively comic."

That doubt as to how *The Cabinet Minister* should be

regarded may, in fact, be set down to the stereotyped views of audiences at that period. They wanted to know whether they were meant to laugh or to cry. Left to decide for themselves, they felt worried, annoyed. But, in fact, the dubious reception was due to the piece itself, which was little in accordance with the formula of "possible people doing improbable things." We might accept as possible the Secretary of State who plays the flute and allows his wife to do the most desperate things in her efforts to escape from money entanglements. We might accept Lady Twombley with an effort; Joseph Lebanon one cannot regard as anything but a stock figure of low comedy. He is extremely funny, but he is never for a moment convincing. His sister, Mrs. Gaylustre, the pushing, fashionable dressmaker is much more real.

A low-class moneylender with social ambitions would not behave as Joseph behaves. Accompanying social ambition is always some faint idea of social conventions. The vulgarian who likes to tell long, tedious tales about his own vulgar exploits has no fancy for what Mr. Lebanon (excuse his humour!) describes as "the top of the social tree where the cocoanuts are." The very fact of the existence of social ambition implies an instinct, however rudimentary, for what Matthew Arnold called "fit and pleasing forms of social life and manners." Mr. Lebanon has no such instinct, therefore his anxiety "to cut an eight on the frozen lake of gentility" has no apparent motive—not even the desire to advance

his financial schemes at the expense of his aristocratic acquaintances.

No, Mr. Lebanon is not observed freshly, but taken for granted; and he ought not to be taken for granted because, off the stage, he does not exist. The rest of the characters, beyond the four mentioned, merely serve to fill up spaces. *The Cabinet Minister* is a play that can always be counted upon to amuse, but it goes no further than that.

Vastly better was *The Amazons*, produced at the Court Theatre in 1893, and written after *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, apparently by way of relaxation. Mr. Pinero's art gained greatly, even in the writing of a farce, from his more serious effort to offer criticism upon life. *The Cabinet Minister* was loosely planted in the top soil of character. Its relation to life was of the smallest. *The Amazons* has its roots deep down. It is founded upon eternal principles of human nature. In a jesting manner it brings us face to face with realities. There is more insight into the heart of things in it, more sympathy with the aches and pains of humanity, than in any of the farces Mr. Pinero had given us before it. Take the scene quite early in the play in which Lady Castlejordan tells the old family clergyman her life's sorrow.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

You knew Jack, my husband.

MINCHIN

Ah! yes, indeed.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

What was he?

MINCHIN

A gentle giant. A grand piece of muscular humanity. In frame, the Vikings must have been of the same pattern.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

And you remember me as I was twenty years ago?

MINCHIN. [*Looking at her*]

I've no excuse for forgetting.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

I was a fit mate for my husband.

MINCHIN

Perfect.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

Even in Jack's time I never scaled less than ten stone, and he could lift me as if I were a sawdust doll. Old friend—! Oh! old friend, what a son my son and Jack's ought to have been!

[*She leans upon the gate.*

MINCHIN

But—but—but it didn't please Providence to send you a son.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN. [*Beating the gate*]

Oh! Oh!

MINCHIN

Come, come, do learn to view the matter resignedly.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

Girls! Girls!

MINCHIN

Why despise girls? Many people like girls. Bless my heart, *I* like girls!

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

You can recall Noeline's arrival. I was sure she was going to be a boy—so was Jack. I knew it—so did Jack. The child was to have been christened Noel, Jack's second name.

MINCHIN

Yes, I was up at the Hall that night, smoking with Castlejordan to keep him quiet.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

Poor dear, I remember his bending over me afterwards and whispering, "Damn it, Miriam, you've lost a whole season's hunting for nothing!" Then the second.

MINCHIN

Lady Wilhelmina.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

Yes, Billy came next. Jack wouldn't speak to me for a couple of months after that, the only fall out we ever had.

MINCHIN

But your third, Lady Thomasine.

LADY CASTLEJORDAN

Dearest Tommy! Oh, by that time Jack and I had agreed to regard anything that was born to us as a boy, and to treat it accordingly, and for the rest of his life my husband taught our three children—there never was another—to ride, fish, shoot, swim, fence, fight, wrestle, throw, run, jump, until they were as hardy as Indians and their muscles burst the sleeves of their jackets. And when Jack went I continued their old training. Of course I—I recognize my boys' little deficiencies, but I'm making the best of the great disappointment of my life, and I—well, call me the eccentric Lady Castlejordan! What do I care? [*She sits, wiping her eyes.*

There is an undercurrent of tenderness and sympathy beneath the light tone. There is evidence in every line that the writer of it understands the hidden tragedies of men's and women's lives, and is set upon creating character, not merely upon scratching a little from off the surface aspect of things. The three Amazons themselves are cleverly distinguished—Noeline, the average nice young woman; Wilhelmina, the embodiment of all that is essentially feminine; Thomasine, the delightful tomboy, whose mannishness never swaggers itself into vulgarity. The three men are capitally drawn, too, though Lord

Tweenways strains a little one's belief, with his family pride even in the ailments that have been transmitted to him from the generations of his race who have "made history." As he was played by Mr. Weedon Grossmith it was impossible to do anything but laugh at the ridiculous lordling. But in the printed book he seems a trifle overdrawn. André de Grival is now and then just a shade too much the stage Frenchman, but then a Frenchman freshly observed and faithfully presented might be resented by the majority of playgoers as untrue to their ideas. Altogether, *The Amazons* is a piece full of entertainment and charm, and, as I said above, a piece that strikes notes of a deeper tone.

To sum up in a few words, the qualities that give these farces their special merit are the substantial reality of the character-drawing—not of the central figures alone, but many of the subordinate characters as well; the natural manner in which the plots and situations arise out of the idiosyncrasies of the people; the easy humour and wit of the dialogue. They are not valuable as pictures of the manners of the time as *The Way of the World* is valuable, and *The School for Scandal*, and, in a sense, Robertson's more sincere comedies. They contain, indeed, little enough social observation; their *milieu* is the accepted land of theatrical make-believe, where people behave as an average audience likes to think it behaves itself. They will scarcely live, then, as Congreve and Sheridan's plays live. But they are not being allowed to die, at any rate, by this generation.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CENSOR OF HIS AGE

"I wish to speak of great things with gratitude and of mean things with indignation."—From *The Times*.

THE farces made Pinero's position as a dramatist secure. People of judgment who took any interest in the theatre placed him well above his competitors of the day. He was the only one who had the indefinable gift of style. But it was not until *Sweet Lavender* (1888) had conquered the big theatrical public that he became popular—and rich.

It has been said often that Edward Terry's amusing study of the intemperate barrister in the Temple was accountable for the popularity of this play. That does the author injustice. The actor (who, by the way, was not related to the other Terrys) certainly made the most of his materials, but the materials were all there to his hand. He invented nothing. He simply embodied Pinero's idea.

Yet it is equally certain that Dick Phenyl made the play. He was a genuine bit of comic characterization, once seen never to be forgotten. Often spoken of as a "Dickens type," he was too well observed to be that. He was not compounded of one or two eccentricities; he was a real person. One remembers vividly his question to the respectable family solicitor who disapproves of his indulgence in spirits: "If you

don't take drop weak whisky an' wa'er after the labours of the day, when *do* you take drop weak whisky an' wa'er? " One chuckles after many years at the memory of his reformation. " Not a drop for seven days. That's a fearful drought eh? I hesitate even at gravy." One thinks of his dress suit. " The coat and waistcoat are in fair preservation, but the rest of it has been attending funerals for years."

There is other good stuff in the play, a brisk little sketch of a real American, freshly noted and humorously drawn without the silly exaggeration usual in those days. Horace has one excellent witty little speech. He is told by an English girl that " she really could not marry an American."

HORACE

Miss Gilfillian, you are like the typical English gentleman who says, " Give me a home-made watch." Nobody does give it to him, but he pays sixty guineas for one, has his crest carved on it, and is borne down on one side with the weight of it for years. When it is not being cleaned, it enables him to lose his train. At last it is stolen from him in a crowd—so he swears a little, buys a cheap American timepiece, and lives happily. Miss Gilfillian, perhaps some day when you have won and worn your home-made husband you'll give a thought to the cheap but reliable American who now has the honour to wish you good-bye.

But for the rest, what a welter of old stage tricks—seduction, bank failure, recognition between old lovers, the unknown daughter—and what a bath of molasses! That was what made the million like *Sweet Lavender*. It was a comfortable, intelligible entertainment.

There is a great deal of fun in it and a good deal of tenderness, and the characters are so pleasantly unreal that we judge them not according to our moral sense of their conduct, but as beings who move in a world that is not governed by the hard facts of life as we know it. The persons of the play are (as Charles Lamb called those of the artificial comedy of the eighteenth century) the "fictitious, half-believed personages of the stage"; and *Sweet Lavender* is a piece that allows us "to escape from the pressure of reality."

Its popularity is generally explained by a vague reference to its "genial humanity" and "kindliness" and "sweetness." I confess I fail to see the "genial humanity" of a man who ruins a woman and leaves her with a child to become a lodging-house drudge. I do not discern the "sweetness" of a frowsy old barrister with no occupation but fuddling and scandalizing his neighbours. I do not quite know that I duly appreciate the "human nature" of the young man who persuades himself that the daughter of the lodging-house drudge, a child who, so far as we see in the play, has not an idea in her head, will make him a suitable wife. But then Mr. Pinero, having chosen such characters, showed his cleverness by working upon the general fondness for people who "have some good in them after all."

Two of these undesirables were oddly whitewashed for American audiences. Daniel Frohman tells in his *Reminiscences* "how first-night patrons in New York were startled to find that the heroine of

Sweet Lavender was an illegitimate child. It seemed to cast a pall upon the assemblage. I felt it and saw the reason. I cabled the author for permission to make a slight change in the relations of the parents. He grudgingly consented and deprecated the attitude of the public mind on the subject. But, as the result of my revision, the play ran a season."

There was nothing, however, in *Sweet Lavender* to make London playgoers wince as they had winced at *The Hobby Horse* (1886). This was Pinero's first effort in sentimental comedy with a dash of satire. It was not much of a success for two reasons. There was no central figure in it to send spectators away eagerly repeating the good things they had heard or wishful to describe some powerful acting. Nor was there a plot stuffed with unrealities. The story was a straight one; it was simply, naturally, told. The characters were living men and women.

The satire played around a wife married to a husband much older than herself who tired of her home and wanted to try the then fashionable amusement, "slumming." In the pages of *Punch* during 1886 many references to "slumming" are to be found. Attention had been turned to the wretched houses in which a large part of London's population lived. People were urged to go and see the slums with their own eyes.

Mrs. Spencer Jermyn responds to that appeal. She pretends to her husband that she is going to stay with a friend. She actually goes to a poor quarter of London and takes a room in the house where the

curate of the parish and his sister are living. One of the blots on the credibility of the story is her stepson's acquaintance with this sister; he is, of course, in love with her; he and his stepmother do not recognize one another for he has been at sea—they have never met. These coincidences are more than one can reconcile with absolute probability. But coincidences only annoy us when we feel that the dramatist would have been unable to work out his theme without them. In a piece which shows us such genuine characters as are drawn in *The Hobby-Horse* we take little heed of the means employed to exhibit and contrast them to the best advantage.

Both the Jermyns are quite real people within limitations—the limitations, to wit, of the author's interest in them. Noel Brice is a really well-drawn parson of the muscular Christian type, a charming fellow as well as a good man. When he finds that he has let himself think with affection of one whom he mistakenly supposed to be an unmarried woman, we sympathize sincerely with his pain and shame. But he does not sentimentalize over his mistake and his bitter disillusionment. He bears his trouble like a man. The spectators cannot sentimentalize over him.

This affords one reason for the small amount of popularity which the piece won in 1886. The vast majority of playgoers wanted to snuffle, to have their less noble emotions titillated gently, instead of having their finer feelings brought into play, and their mind and heart braced up by the dramatist's sane outlook

upon life. In 1886 the new dramatic movement had scarcely begun so far as England was concerned. What the playgoer of 1886 felt, was that *The Hobby Horse* defrauded him of the *dénouement* which he had been led to expect. If Noel Brice, the heroic young clergyman, was allowed to fall in love with Mrs. Jermyn, then the unfortunate Mr. Jermyn ought to have fallen a victim in the nick of time to the familiar fatal last act malady, and the curtain could have come down upon a purpose of marriage. Or, in the alternative course, the audience ought to have been treated to some scene of maudlin tears and sugary-sweet, unmanly lamentation against Fate. To send the poor young man about his business with never so much as a single appeal to the lachrymose sensibility of the easily-moved was an unheard-of departure from precedent. And yet who can read or hear the last little scene in which Brice figures without a glistening beneath the eyelids? It is as far away from sentimentality as can be, but it strikes a deep, true note of real emotion.

MRS. JERMYN

Spencer, you know the mistake that has occurred. Say what you like to me—but beg his pardon, for I can't.

MR. JERMYN

Mr. Brice, Mrs. Jermyn tells me I am to beg your pardon. I do so. I have married a very foolish, headstrong lady—I beg your pardon. Mrs. Jermyn keeps your niece company and assists you in your parish work without my permission—I beg your pardon. In the meantime you fall in love with my wife, sir, and you ultimately propose marriage to her in my presence—I beg your pardon.

MRS. JERMYN

Oh, dear! oh, dear! You're not doing it properly.

NOEL BRICE

Mr. Jermyn, the tone you speak in spares me the pain of thinking you believe an apology is necessary. As for my mistake, it is slighter than you imagine.

MR. JERMYN

Slighter?

NOEL BRICE

Yes, sir. The only great mistake possible in proposing marriage is to select an unworthy object. I fell into no such error. I believed Miss Moxon to be a generous, warm-hearted lady whom any man should be proud to call his wife. I thought that and I think it still.

MR. JERMYN

But your Miss Moxon is Mrs. Jermyn, Mr. Brice.

NOEL BRICE

So I find—and upon that I congratulate you with all my heart.

Tom Clark, otherwise Allan Jermyn, and Bertha, Noel's niece, are the pleasantest pair of boy and girl lovers we can recall out of endless plays in which such characters, borrowed originally from the French, have been held to be necessary. If ever they were tolerable on the stage it would be in the persons of this breezy young sailor and the charming little person to whom he loses his boyish heart. Tom's explanation of the manner in which he proposes to inform his father of his marriage is delicious in its humour and simplicity. He has just opened his heart to the supposed Miss Moxon, who is really Mrs. Jermyn, his stepmother. She questions him about his prospects.

MRS. JERMYN

Are you very well off, then?

TOM CLARK

Haven't a brass button, you know.

MRS. JERMYN

Really, Mr. Clark!

TOM CLARK

But my dear old father is rich. He and I quarrel awfully;

MRS. JERMYN

Well, then, how——

TOM CLARK

Why, the moment I marry I write and break it gently to the dad—"Dear Dad, I'm married. Yours, etcetera!" See?

MRS. JERMYN

Perfectly. That couldn't be a shock to him, could it?

TOM CLARK

No. Well, then, what's the result? Dad burning with anxiety to see my wife—*my wife*! Oh, doesn't it sound jolly?

MRS. JERMYN

It *sounds* pretty well!

TOM CLARK

I take her home! I can picture father standing, glum and sulky, at the gate! "Who's this?" I can hear him saying it. "My wife, dad!" "Your wife! What, that pretty little fairy! I like your taste, my boy—come in, we dine at seven." See?

Mr. Pinching, the solicitor who always thinks of the right thing to say just a moment too late, is amusing, though cut a little too rigidly to pattern. Miss Moxon has more actuality, and perhaps the author meant her to be not quite a lady. The broken-down jockeys whom Jermyn does his best to reclaim and

benefit are very funny and really not exaggerated. The workmanship of the play is excellent—even above Mr. Pinero's very high level of excellence in this direction.

The piece suggested even to Bernard Shaw hopes of Pinero's future. He saw in it "character, humour, observation, genuine comedy, and literary workmanship," the qualities which he praised later in *The Benefit of the Doubt*. When he saw it again after eleven years, he declared it to be "not a comedy but a provincial farce." He felt that it had been "distorted and debased to suit the childishness and vulgarity of the theatre of 1886."

That is a harsh verdict. Shaw's first thoughts were best.

The Hobby Horse showed up clearly for the first time the bent of Pinero's mind. He is, above all, a satirist. He is what the Romans called *censor morum*, a critic and corrector of manners, of public and private behaviour. It pleases him to notice and call attention to folly, pretentiousness, caddishness, vanity, to the miscalculations of the selfish, the squirmings of the weak.

Up to the writing of *The Hobby Horse* he had been occupied in earning his living, learning his trade. He had not much opportunity for thinking about life. He "adapted" plays from the French, he acted night after night. I have seen the statement made that he remained on the stage until 1883 "because he wanted to learn how plays looked from the actor's point of view." His reason was not that; it was that

he could not keep himself without the weekly salary he received.

By the time he wrote *The Hobby Horse* his intellect had matured. He was thirty. His outlook on life had been formed. He was at that time, he has remained always, more a craftsman than a man with a message to his generation. But his estimate of human nature and of life could be found even in his lightest, most dexterous work. It was a satirical estimate, the estimate of a man whose lips, when he contemplated his fellow-creatures, were twisted with a wry smile.

Satire alone he saw would never do, never be popular. So he mixed sentiment with satire, stirred in so much sweet stuff with the bitter that sometimes his audience were puzzled to know what he was giving them. At other times they could taste nothing but an overpowering predominance of sugar.

There was this predominance in *The Weaker Sex* (1889) which had the advantage of Mrs. Kendal's appearance in the leading part—the part of a mother who has once been loved by a man who eighteen years afterwards is in love with her daughter. A difficult theme to handle with acceptance! It is curious to contrast with Pinero's Victorian handling of it the treatment which the same situation received from Mr. Benn Levy in *Art and Mrs. Bottle*. Neither playwright managed to do much with it. There is something in the idea so eminently distasteful to the mind of the average healthy person that a play dealing with it starts at a heavy disadvantage. Also, it is difficult to reconcile such a situation with probability.

In this case Philip Lyster is obliged not only to have been absent from England for eighteen years (just time enough for the daughter to be born and grow up) but also to have assumed another name, a poetical *nom de guerre*, under which he is known to the young girl.

Our sense of the reasonable and the likely is revolted as well by Lady Vivash's sentimental treasuring up of the memory of the man she quarrelled with eighteen years before the date of the play. There are women who treat men badly—she admits that she was " wilful, capricious, cruel "—and then maunder over their bad behaviour for the rest of their lives. But the dramatist who takes a sane view of life ought never to treat such women seriously. They should be shown as they actually are—monsters of egotism, going through life wrapped in a mantle of selfish complacency and self-consciousness, indulging themselves with the luxury of a woe that has no existence save in their own trumpery imaginations. Put such creatures into comedy and let people laugh at them, and go away feeling that you have cleared the air of a little cant. But do not ask us to sympathize with their smug pretence of emotion, with their endeavour to persuade themselves that they are vastly interesting persons, consumed by a passion of which they know perfectly well they are by nature incapable.

Of course Mr. Pinero did not believe in his theme. If he had, he would hardly have provided the play with alternative endings. For the provinces he made Philip Lyster marry Sylvia after all. In London the

more rational conclusion prevailed—if an unnatural situation can have any rational conclusion—and Philip passed out of the lives of both mother and daughter. He does it in the most approved manner of the sentimentalist.

DUDLEY

Oh! Philip, is there no way but this?

PHILIP

None. You know it, Dudley. Once my shadow is taken from the lives of these two women there will be light again. I pray to time to do the rest. Time will bless some worthier man than I with Sylvia's sweet companionship, and then the first laugh from Sylvia's lips will wake Mary from her long dream.

Cannot you hear the audience rustling for its hats and coats and umbrellas, and murmuring to itself about getting out before the crowd? O sentiment, what atrocities are perpetrated in thy name!

Still more sugary was *Lady Bountiful* (1891). Yet satire was there—satire on a sponger of good family, a man who thought it more below his dignity to work than to live on the bounty of a niece.

" Lady Bountiful " was the niece's nickname. She was rich, she scattered her money profusely. He had spent all he ever had, so he lived contentedly on hers, so long as she would let him. His son is a parasite too, until he discovers what his position is. He has been told so pretty plainly by his cousin when he asked her to marry him.

CAMILLA

You've no right to speak to me like this!

DENNIS

No right? Why, a man doesn't love by right.

CAMILLA

A man *should* love by right; by the right of some achievement which deserves reward, or some failure which earns consolation. But you!

DENNIS

I know what you mean. Idle at school; in the wrong set at college; and now if I started in the race a boy would beat me.

CAMILLA. [*To herself*]

Ah!

DENNIS

And so I beg your pardon for dreaming you could stoop to pick a weed from the bricks of your stableyard.

CAMILLA

Dennis, it isn't great men women love dearest, or even fortunate men; often, I tell you, their deepest love goes out to those who labour and fail. But for those who make no effort, who are neither great nor little, who are the nothings of the world——

DENNIS

Who are the Dennis Herons of the world!

CAMILLA

For those a true woman has only one feeling—anger and contempt.

Camilla Brent is quite right—right in her opinion and right in telling her cousin what it is. Stung to action by her plain speaking, he determines to do something for his living. Naturally, he flies to an extreme. He has little aptitude for any of the ordinary pursuits of workaday life. But he is thoroughly at home with horses. So he takes a situation as a riding-master. To his genially selfish, worthless, and

unprincipled father (whose relationship to "the well-known family of the Skimpoles" Mr. Pinero acknowledged on the play-bill) this decision seems little short of madness. Why should they be ashamed of living on Camilla's bounty?

> Camilla is wealthy—no credit to her; she can't help it. We're poor—no discredit to us; we can't help it. Camilla has a large house with empty rooms and beds in them—why on earth shouldn't we occupy those rooms and air those beds? Camilla's cook prepares a dinner for four persons—a dinner for four is a dinner for six. Really, you know, an extra oyster in the oyster-sauce or an additional pinch of curry in the Mulligatawny represents—looked at in the right way—the extent of our obligations to Camilla. . . . So do, dear Dennis, abandon this crazy desire to earn your own living. It's not even original; so many men have it. And, great heavens, you'll compromise us—you really will. If people learn that my son is a cad of a riding-master they'll think I—I've no means, you know!

However, Dennis sticks to his determination, and when he finds that the pretty, gentle, little daughter of the worthy man he serves has lost her heart to her father's assistant, he feels that he is bound to her in gratitude and honour. So he marries this pretty, gentle, little Margaret Veale. This brings us to the end of the second act. In the third act Margaret dies—dies in a scene that is imagined with rare tenderness, written with sympathy and power—a scene that wrings the heart—dies, and leaves Dennis free to find the happiness he surrendered in giving up all thought of Camilla.

Five years pass before he does find it; in the meantime he has prospered in America and Camilla has

agreed to marry an old admirer. He reaches England on the eve of the wedding, meets Camilla in the village church, asks her to reconsider the answer she gave him six years before, and learns that her troth is plighted to another. Then the momentary curtain parts one day from the next, and we see the church next morning filled with guests and villagers. The bride enters, sees Dennis, who is standing in her path, "totters back with her hand to her brow," and murmurs his name. Then the old gentleman sees that his chance has fled, and says:

> There shall be no marriage to-day. I think I know, I think I know.

It is not the melodrama of this ending that spoils it—it is its ineffectiveness. Often a daring melodramatic touch will help to carry off a situation that is otherwise of the serious order. But here the melodrama falls absolutely flat. The lowering of the curtain leads the audience to look for some final scene of an unexpected, interesting nature. This tame conclusion sends them away disappointed, and, in their disappointment, they forget how good the rest of the play has been. Mr. Pinero, indeed, must have forgotten this himself when he wrote such a finish to it.

The repetition of the letter trick, too, is a trifle lacking in ingenuity. Dennis finds a letter and learns that Margaret loves him. Another letter which falls into his hands by chance tells him that Margaret, before she died, foresaw that he and Camilla would

come together in the end. In a drama of action, of violent emotions, of scenes that carry the spectator irresistibly with them in a gust of passion, almost any expedient for arriving at the necessary juxtapositions of character will pass muster. But *Lady Bountiful* is a play so slight in texture that its theme demands all the *vraisemblance* possible in treatment.

> My masters, will you hear a simple tale?
> No war, no lust, not a commandment broke
> By sir or madam, but a history
> To make a rhyme to speed a young maid's hour.

So the author himself described it, and some critics have found here the reason for its failure to attract audiences. "The kind of play," these critics call it, "of which everyone approves in theory and from which they unanimously stop away in practice." There is a good deal of truth in this view. We English do undoubtedly try to make each other, and even try to make ourselves, believe that we are more strictly moral and fonder of conventional virtue than we should be found if our hearts could be surprised and set in shop windows. We could never bring ourselves, as a nation, to confess that we accepted anything lower than the standards of the highest morality. Charrier, in *Les Effrontés*, excuses his philosophy of life thus: "Mon Dieu, je sais bien que ce n'est pas la morale de l'Evangile, mais c'est celle du monde."[1] That is the French view of the case. We prefer to practise *la morale du monde* while we profess loudly all

[1] "O well, I know it isn't the morality of the Gospels, but it's that of the world."

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the time that we are trying to live up to l'Evangile. Perhaps a good many of us are trying, but the fact remains that very few succeed.

Lady Bountiful stuck in the shoals of sentiment. *The Times* (1891) lay along the edge of farce. Not a farce like the famous three (*Magistrate*, *Schoolmistress*, *Dandy Dick*). Its figures moved in no fantastic atmosphere. They were in a recognizable setting, their surroundings were familiar, their relation to real life not impalpable, remote. Yet in this setting they behaved so oddly that it was hard to believe them real. They were possible people, but were they doing probable things?

The butt of satire here was a representative of the New Rich. There are New Rich in every age. At one time they are speculators in gold mines, diamond fields; at another, war profiteers. One generation sees shopkeepers become wealthy, another watches the dazzling ascent of jugglers with finance. It was a draper whom Pinero chose for the central figure of this first satirical comedy of his, the first play in which his mind revealed itself without seeking to hide its intention behind a smoke screen of sentimentality. The opening scene was the work of one already a master of stagecraft. In a few sentences the nature of the story is exposed. In the drawing-room of Mr. and Mrs. Egerton-Bompas's London house an aristocratic-looking woman and a young man are shown by a manservant.

LURGASHALL

Lady Ripstow and Lord Lurgashall.

Photo by Window & Grove]

MRS. JOHN WOOD

an irresistibly comic actress in broad farce (though her Victorian costume makes it difficult to believe this).

MANSERVANT

I'm aware, m'lord.

LADY RIPSTOW

I think Mrs. Egerton-Bompas will see me.

MANSERVANT

I'm sure she will, m'lady, if she's at home.

LADY RIPSTOW

She is not " at home " this afternoon, I know, but she may be indoors.

MANSERVANT

I'll ask Codrington, m'lady.

LADY RIPSTOW

Codrington?

MANSERVANT

My mistress's maid's woman, m'lady. [*He goes out.*

LADY RIPSTOW

" My mistress's maid's woman "! The wives of drapers have their comforts, Denham.

LURGASHALL

My dear mother!

LADY RIPSTOW

Is not Mr. Bompas a draper?

LURGASHALL

Mr. Egerton-Bompas——

LADY RIPSTOW

Egerton!

LURGASHALL

Mr. Egerton-Bompas is a draper on a large scale.

LADY RIPSTOW

He has a dozen shops all in a row, you mean.

LURGASHALL

Fourteen, as a matter of fact.

LADY RIPSTOW

Surely that makes him fourteen times a draper.

LURGASHALL

At any rate Beryl is not a draper.

LADY RIPSTOW

She is a draper's daughter. If she becomes your wife, she will still be a draper's daughter; if children are born to you they will be a draper's daughter's children.

LURGASHALL

They will be amiable and beautiful, like Beryl.

LADY RIPSTOW

But not perfectly patrician, like yourself. To cull an illustration from the drapery business——

LURGASHALL

Pray, mother!

LADY RIPSTOW

Beryl is cotton, you are silk; each material in itself is estimable, but cotton *and* silk beget satinet.

At once the spectators know what the play is to be about and can settle down to watch developments. At least they could in 1891 when *The Times* was produced. In London theatres now the practice of coming in late has become so general that authors write scenes at the beginning which have nothing to do with the story and are not missed by the late-comers. Thus Bernard Shaw opened *The Apple Cart* with a conversation between two secretaries totally irrelevant to the rest of the piece, which did not really begin until it was over. Appeals have sometimes been made to audiences to be seated at the hour fixed for the performance to start "as the interest of the play begins from the rising of the curtain." In 1891 people paid a dramatist the compliment of punctuality.

Lady Ripstow goes on to ask her son if he has seen his father about his engagement. Will he call on the parents of his daughter-in-law to be? He has promised to think this over.

LADY RIPSTOW

Of course you made him aware that Mr. Bompas sits for the northern division of St. Swithin's?

LURGASHALL

Of course.

LADY RIPSTOW

That afforded him no relief.

LURGASHALL

Not perceptibly.

LADY RIPSTOW

You emphasized—on the Conservative side of the House?

LURGASHALL

Yes, but my father's theory is that a common man's profession of Conservative principles is merely a device to rub shoulders with superior people.

LADY RIPSTOW

Theodore is penetrating.

LURGASHALL

And he anticipates that every Conservative politician who has any respect for himself will soon be driven to extreme Radicalism to find decent companionship.

LADY RIPSTOW

Your father will *never* call here, Denham.

LURGASHALL

So be it, mother.

This does not shake the quiet young man's intention to marry Beryl. He knows that they think alike. They both find the London Season "a wearisome

affair." Neither of them cares for what is called gaiety—"the gaiety of climbing a flight of stairs to clutch at a haggard hostess on a landing."

This was in the days of late evening parties in large houses where the host and hostess stood at the top of a staircase up which their guests struggled to shake hands, and then to become for a short time part of a crowd scarcely able to move. Several such entertainments would be visited on the same evening by persons who were "in Society." Thus Lurgashall asks Beryl if she is going to Lady Orillian's that evening.

"No," she says, "we don't know her—I mean, of course, she doesn't know us. This is our lot. [*Reading from a tablet.*] The Horace Bennett's, the Stratfields', Mrs. Peter Cathew's, music at the Verulam Club, the Spratt-Thompsons'. Shall I pass you on any of those stairs?"

LURGASHALL

I shall be at Mrs. Cathew's about eleven.

BERYL

A trifle early for us.

LURGASHALL

Early?

BERYL

We used to go very early to such places and stay right through, but now that papa has "got on," we arrive late everywhere and murmur an apology. [LURGASHALL *laughs.*] Ah, don't laugh! If you realized as I do the sham, the falseness, of this sort of thing you wouldn't, you couldn't laugh—you'd cry. One's life seems to be made up of parade and pretension.

Such a Society as this needed satire to ridicule it out of existence. It exists no longer. Writing about it is like describing the customs and barbaric ritual of some tribe of semi-imbecile savages. Beryl talks exactly as any sensible young woman of the late Victorian age would have talked in her situation.

In his preface to the play, the first he published, Pinero said he " laid bare no horrid social wound, wrangled over no vital problem." He merely administered a " mimic castigation of the lighter faults of humanity in the hope that it might prove entertaining, nay, more, to certain simple minds instructive."

" There may be still those who consider that the follies, even the vices, of the age may be chastised as effectually by a sounding blow from the hollow bladder of the jester as by the fierce application of the knout; that a moral need not invariably be enforced with the sententiousness of the sermon or the assertiveness of the tract."

If any question was raised by the play, it was only the old, often-asked question—" Can the depths be sounded of ignorance, of vulgarity of mind, of vanity, and of self-seeking? "

It was the low intellectual standard of the theatre at that date which made the authors's little apology disparage his own effort, assure " kind friends in front " that he meant no harm. He emphasized this appeal by putting on the title-page some words from a speech of Lurgashall's in the play: " I don't aspire to great things, but I wish to speak of great things with gratitude and of mean things with indignation."

Yet there was little need, surely, to apologize for showing up the follies of those who claimed to be the leaders of a great nation; the crawling ignominy to which men and women would stoop in the hope of being numbered among those leaders? This Pinero did vigorously in *The Times* notwithstanding his pathetic request to the public to take no notice of the watchdog's bark.

Joyful beyond measure at the prospect of their daughter being some day a countess, Mr. and Mrs. Egerton-Bompas are plunged into sudden desolation by the news that their son, a silly young undergraduate, has married an Irish landlady's daughter. He has brought his wife and her mother to London "to see what can be done"—or rather they have brought him. The girl is good-looking but lacks refinement, is without education. The mother is a shade worse. Well, what is to be done?

Beryl says, "Let's decide to make the best of it." Her father's reply to this is, "How dare you, how dare you, how dare you?" He has no idea himself, but he gets one from an aristocratic tout whom he pays to help him up the social ladder, a sponger upon his relatives, upon anyone who will contribute to keep going his useless degenerate existence. This "friend of the family" remembers "a case in point."

BOMPAS

Case in point? Case in—similar?

TRIMBLE

Well, it was the instance of a dear friend of mine—a mem-

ber of the Upper House by-the-bye—a dear friend of mine whose boy, having fallen in love with a common little provincial shopgirl, did the wrong thing by her and surreptitiously married her.

BOMPAS

That's similar. A peer, too—it happens to the best of us! Well?

TRIMBLE

Well, *that* girl was unencumbered by relatives——

BOMPAS

Like——?

TRIMBLE

Like these good people. It was hearing the widow say she's minus relatives that put this old affair into my head.

BOMPAS

But what was done! What was done? What was done?

TRIMBLE

Why, my dear old friend, Lord—but I must be careful—my dear old friend hit upon a somewhat daring idea. He never revealed the circumstance of his son's clandestine marriage.

BOMPAS

What good did that——?

TRIMBLE

Wait. Keeping this marriage a secret, he created for the poor girl, entirely out of his imagination, a decent if not distinguished parentage and a thoroughly creditable past, into which, owing to its fictitiousness, it was naturally impossible for his friends to pry.

BOMPAS

He pretended the girl—was a lady, you mean?

TRIMBLE

Certainly—and he made her one. He took her to his heart, dear fellow, had her manners and her orthography duly polished, and eventually he presented to the world as the *fiancée* of his son a young person fitted in all essentials to adorn Society.

BOMPAS

By Jove!

TRIMBLE

The wedding took place. . . . Everyone was radiant and happy.

At first the plan revolts Bompas. He is by nature a decent straight man, only seduced from straightforwardness by the desire to cut a dash. But he cannot see any other way out of his difficulty. He is forced to agree that Mrs. Hooley and her daughter shall henceforth be known as Mrs. and Miss Mountrafford, that they shall live in the Egerton-Bompas house, that they shall be taught as much as anyone can teach them, and that in due course Howard the son shall marry his Honoria over again.

The play shows how this scheme breaks down. To begin with, the "Mountraffords" behave as might be expected. To go on with, an Irish member of Parliament courts the mother for her supposed future. As a final catastrophe, Howard and Honoria let out their secret to Honoria's governess who tells her aunt (or more probably mother), the proprietor of a newspaper, with the result that it is mentioned in a slightly veiled manner, enough being said to show who the parties are.

With bustling spirited action proceeds the tearing away of the net of deception carefully arranged around the Egerton-Bompas's by themselves and their aristocratic tout. The Conservative M.P. has to promise that he will join the Irish Party: this is McShane's price for silence. The newspaper prints a second

Photo by Window & Grove

SIR JOHNSTON FORBES-ROBERTSON

whose performances in *The Profligate* and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* did much to build up his reputation as a leading actor.

paragraph apologizing to another family for the publication of the first.

It is a weary struggle, but husband and wife fight on. Beryl has abandoned them, broken off her engagement; she values her self-respect. Even they begin to wonder whether it is all worth while. They recall with wistful memory the early days of their prosperity.

MRS. BOMPAS

Old man, do you remember twenty years ago when you'd just bought the two shops which were to grow into our present colossal establishment?

BOMPAS

Rather, as if it were yesterday. . . . [*Sadly.*] How we have got on since.

MRS. BOMPAS

Our first big half-past-seven dinner party; do you remember?

BOMPAS

Oh lor' yes, Clara—never mind that.

MRS. BOMPAS

Well, dear, we were inexperienced then. We gave them plenty to eat though.

BOMPAS

It took you half-an-hour to write each menu.

MRS. BOMPAS

Part of the food was sent in, I recollect, and part of it was done at home.

BOMPAS

It doesn't matter much now—many that were there won't clatter another knife and fork—but to this day I regret the part of it that was done at home. . . . That was the night

when we had one of our men from the shop with "P. Bompas" round his coat-collar to announce the guests. . . . Yes, by Jove, it's astonishing how we've got on since then.

[*They both sigh.*

MRS. BOMPAS

Percy. Percy, old man, do you ever feel you'd like to go back?

BOMPAS

Back? It's no good wishing that, Clara. When you've got knowledge, you've lost everything else. It seems to me there's only one thing to do in this world—to go on; even if you're on the wrong road, Clara, my dear, get on, get on.

So they brace up, make further efforts. But all are unavailing. Bompas's nerve has gone, his social and political ambitions disgust him. He sees what a fool he has been.

BOMPAS

I wasn't always as I am *now*. It is "getting on in the world" that has ruined me. I've thought of it all night through. A self-taught man must always be a proud fool; he has a double share of vanity—the vanity of the ready pupil and the vanity of the successful tutor combined! He is blown out till he bursts! I say there ought to be a law to stop men like me from "getting on" beyond a certain point. Prosperity weakens our brains and hardens our hearts; it takes honest friends from us and seats things like that [*pointing to* TEMPLE] in their chairs, it spoils good wives and breeds bad children——

MRS. BOMPAS

No, no, Percy, it hasn't utterly spoilt me. I'm tired too. We'll go away together, you and I, old man, to some place where we're not known and we'll try back—shall we, shall we? [*She kneels beside him.*] All right, Percy, cheer up, old man.

The one drop of comfort in their cup of bitterness is that Beryl and Lurgashall have made it up.

It may be, it ought to be, objected that the speech of Bompas just quoted is out of place in Bompas's mouth. It is the author speaking, not the character. But this does not occur often enough to spoil an admirably-drawn figure. No play that I know, and scarcely any novel, brings out the pathos of the "new man's" position in Society more truly than *The Times*. The fruitlessness of all his strivings to take his place in a world that is not his, the deceit and meanness into which his social ambitions plunge him, the futility of all his efforts to make money do what money alone never can do—that is, to bestow contentment and happiness—all this is shown to us without being too much insisted upon, and we are left with something to think about when we have done laughing and the play is over. Many dramatists have pictured for us the disillusion of the man who will not believe, until he has tried, how much,

> 'Tis better to be lowly born,
> And range with humble livers in content,
> Than to be perked up in a glistering grief,
> And wear a golden sorrow.

No one who has attempted to do this with a light hand has done it more effectively than Mr. Pinero.

Even if Bompas were merely ridiculous *The Times* could never be an entirely comic play so long as Mrs. Bompas remained in it. There is a tragic suggestion about her—the tragedy of a woman's life spoilt, of her true instincts crushed, of her capacity for happiness and content strained and twisted out of its natural shape. She is a snob, too, but she is so mainly be-

cause she knows that the gratification of snobbish instinct is her husband's chief pleasure. When they have secured a Maharaja to dine with them, she seconds Percy in scouting the idea that they should ask their friends to meet him. "I should like the best people in London," she says, to which Mr. Montague Trimble discreetly adds, "the best we can get."

She does not wince at the deception that is practised with the object of making her son's foolish marriage seem to be something quite other than it really is. But there is a point beyond which she cannot pass. When Bompas wildly declares that their policy must be, for the future, self, and that they must throw over their friends if they find it necessary, Mrs. Bompas sees the pitifulness of such a resolve. She has still left some of the feelings of honesty and loyalty that animate her daughter Beryl. She cannot persuade herself that a position in Society is worth all that it costs. She it is, therefore, who puts into her husband's head the idea of giving it up. Her first thought is always for her husband. She is always ready with a cheerful, encouraging word. Beneath her vulgarity there beats the heart of a true woman.

Of the other characters, Montague Trimble is the only one who leaves a distinct impression on the mind. It was a clever sketch of the decadent aristocrat that Pinero gave us. There were numbers of Trimbles to be found in those days acting as guides, philosophers and friends to families of the Egerton-Bompas type; as jackals to the husband, as social coun-

sellors to the wife. The Trimbles are what Dumas *fils* called the *vibrions* of Society—creatures engendered from the corrupt artificiality of modern manners and morals. One of Montague's greatest troubles is when, " for the first time for nearly forty years," he finds himself at eight o'clock not in evening dress! By dwelling upon his little peculiarities Pinero drew a vivid portrait of this contemptible parasite. He comes before us clearly with his insinuating manner, his anxiety to please, his habit of sucking lozenges, his low cunning when difficulties have to be met, his selfish annoyance when his ingenuity fails to avert unpleasant occurrences. Montague Trimble is a creation, a valuable footnote to the social history of the period.

Twelve years went by before Pinero indulged again his purely satirical gift. Then he produced *Letty* (1903), one of the most entertaining of his plays, one of the most popular, yet a complete puzzle if we try to find in it anything more than an anecdote amusingly told. There is more than that in it, but few spectators were aware of this.

Just as well, no doubt. Clever of the author to fill up the spoon which held his bitter powder with the jam of humour. Not at this date with the jam of sentiment. He had got past that. Sentiment was old-fashioned. It was the fun in *Letty* which " kept the theatre open "; the ramping, roaring vulgarity of Fred Kerr as a " bucket-shop " stockbroker; the affectation of a common milliner's assistant, inimitably played by Nancy Price. H. B. Irving did his

best with Irene Vanbrugh to excite a faint sentimental interest in a couple of spineless decadents. They worked hard in vain. The comic artists made the play successful. But behind their antics lay grim satire all the time.

It took for its butt a family of "gentlefolks," not ennobled, not "rich beyond the dreams of avarice," well-off, expensively schooled, accustomed to the best of everything, and—rotten at the core. Somehow the Letchmeres all turn out badly. Nevill, the one to whom we are introduced, cannot think why. Yet the reason is plain enough. They idle their lives away; they have no occupations, no interests.

Nevill has rooms in a fashionable street. He does himself well. Married, but separated from his wife, who has taken their little boy with her, he carries on epicene love affairs with girls in business. His fancy at the moment is for Letty Shell. She is a clerk in the "outside" stockbroker's office. Her employer admires her too, would like to marry her. With her friends, Hilda the milliner and Marion a fellow-clerk, she comes to a tea-party in Nevill's rooms, upon which Mandeville breaks in to say that Letty can become his wife if she chooses. He warns Letchmere to "keep off the grass," to let her alone.

Nevill is too deeply concerned over another matter to decide at once whether he will accept this intimation. His favourite sister is in trouble, has appealed to him for help. She must break off an affair with a young man. Though she detests her husband, she does not want to give him occasion to divorce her.

She begs Nevill to play propriety at a farewell restaurant dinner. After that she will see the young man no more.

This restaurant scene was the making of the piece. Not only are Nevill and the disconsolate couple dining there. Mandeville has a party, too, to celebrate his engagement to Letty. Nevill has told his little friend that she had better accept the vulgarian. She is heavily in debt, her job is none too secure. Miserably she agrees. This dinner party is the result.

An act of uproarious fun, ended by a few words of intimate understanding between Nevill and Letty. She cannot live with such a man as Mandeville, who has bully-ragged the waiters all the evening and has gone off at last to demand an apology from the proprietor for lowering the lights at closing-time. "Come to my rooms later," Nevill says.

Here they are arranging to go abroad when news comes that the favourite sister did not return to her home after the "farewell" dinner, but fled with her young man.

Again Nevill forgets everything but his sister's affairs—and his family failing. "We're all rotten," he says gloomily. Every one of them!

NEVILL

Yes, yes, and so it will be with that small boy of mine—the young gentleman who, if he lives, will some day be the head of my distinguished family. He'll begin life full of the most excellent resolves; despising his forbears—his mamma will teach him *that*; determined to carry it through in fine, reputable style. And then, of a sudden, the blood in him will assert itself, and he, too, will be a genuine Letchmere—a genuine,

out-and-out Letchmere! Phew! Still, would to God there had been one of us, if it had been only a woman, whom they couldn't have cast in the boy's teeth! But no; even Tiny has failed us. [*Rousing himself—to* LETTY.] She was here in the afternoon, Letty, shortly before you came.

LETTY. [*Dully*]

She?

NEVILL

My sister—Florence, here in this room.

LETTY

Was she?

NEVILL

Discussing with me our family imperfections! Ha, yes! It's not many hours ago that I solemnly declared my conviction—declared it honestly!—that it was reserved for her to fly higher than the rest of us! Ho, ho! What was it I said to her? [*Gathering, with an effort, the threads of his conversation with* FLORENCE *of the first act.*] "We're rotten bad, everyone of us—men and women." "*Every* one of us?" she said—I can hear her saying it. "Isn't that a bit premature?" Premature! ha, ha! "I beg your pardon," I said; "not you, Tiny—you'll make a better show than the others. [*His voice softening.*] The family record is monotonous reading, old girl; you'll be the first to vary it for heaven knows how many generations!" Now, even Tiny has failed. What a destiny! What a crew!

In the midst of his maunderings Letty slips away. Faithful to the habit of Pinero's heroines she then commits social suicide by marrying a photographer.

Had she been a girl of any character with an affection for Letchmere, she would have stopped his doddering over the family "doom." She would have told him that what he needed was work to do. She would have offered to help him make a fresh start. But that would not have been like a Pinero creation. In no play has he drawn girl or woman endowed

with energy, decision, grit. Letty was like the rest. She did not shape her fate. She let it be shaped for her.

As one critic of the play saw, "the really interesting problem which ran through it was: Can a man shake off his past?" To that no positive answer was given.

"On the whole, the author seems inclined to assume that, while circumstances are for the most part much too strong for the average individual, while heredity will not be denied, and the children's teeth must necessarily be set on edge because their fathers have eaten sour grapes, it happens now and again that a mere accident will do what the individual will has failed to accomplish. It is a dreary lesson, but the only one, apparently, which a cynical philosophy can provide."

Which is what those who look for "lessons" might say of all Pinero's satirical plays. But none who seek in them amusement, studies of character, criticism of life, will fail to find abundance of each.

Not until after another long interval did Pinero produce another satire. The successor to *Letty* was a piece which it would be more agreeable to pass over, without mention. Even a writer's worst mistakes, however, must find place in a chronicle of his works. *A Wife without a Smile* (1904) was called "a comedy in disguise"; it was humourless, tasteless; and it contained incidents so offensive that critics asked, "Why had the Censor of Plays licensed it?"

To recall what those incidents were would repeat

the offence. Enough to say that the invocation of the Censor made Pinero very angry, all the more so probably because he must have seen that he had made a deplorable error in producing the play. At any rate he withdrew it from circulation as a book. Issued by Heinemann, as Pinero's plays were from 1891 onwards, it disappeared after a while from the publisher's list.

Whether the discussion as to whether *A Wife without a Smile* should have been " censored " had any influence upon the view Pinero took of the Censorship as an institution, it is impossible to know; his attitude towards it did change, however. He had declared shortly before this piece was staged that he could see nothing in the objection to an official having power to prohibit the performance of plays. " I know of no cause," he said, " operating against the production of fine modern drama upon the English-speaking stage, except the disinclination or the inability of the modern dramatist to write it."

By the year 1909, when a Parliamentary Committee inquired into the reasons for retaining a Censorship, Pinero had joined those who urged its fatuity. He did not think, he told the Committee, that it had seriously retarded the growth of British Drama up to that time, but that drama was now entering upon a period of new fertility, dignity, and power: a Censorship must seriously impede its development.

Asked whether he ever wrote in dread of interference, he replied that he never thought of the Censor while he was writing a play. When it was finished,

he could not sleep for thinking of him. Surely a pleasant exaggeration!

For five years after *A Wife Without a Smile* Pinero avoided humour. He kept strictly to drama. Then he tried a purely comic play again, distinct from satiric comedy. Again he failed to hit anywhere near the centre of the target. *Preserving Mr. Panmure* (1911) was about a girl who had been kissed. Even in that year it would have been difficult to find a girl making such a fuss about it. Josepha Quarendon was no " sheltered virgin " either. She had earned her living. She had occupied " a bare furnished lodging in Bloomsbury." She would have taken the kiss philosophically, made it clear that there were not to be others, shrugged her shoulders and said nothing. As it was, she behaved like an idiot and set everyone in a country-house guessing as to who had kissed her.

Preserving Mr. Panmure was " pure theatre " and not good theatre. It was a relief to playgoers with a respect for Pinero when he went back in the next year to satire once more.

The Mind-the-Paint-Girl, produced in 1912, was like *Trelawny of the Wells*, a story of the lives of certain " theatrical folk," in the present, not in the past. This time Pinero chose them from the musical comedy of his own day. He drew the new type of popular favourite, the young actress who knew how to " take care of herself." Lily Parradell would flirt with a dozen men, keep them hanging around her, accept presents from them, drive and sup with them—

not alone if she could help it; hold them cleverly at arm's length if they claimed more recompense than she chose to permit. In the song which helped to make her famous at the Pandora Theatre she told her audience that

> A girl is not a sinner just because she's not a saint,

and warned admirers plainly

> I'll cry out for assistance
> If you fail to keep your distance.

They might "come a little nearer," but they "mustn't touch the paint."

> Once you smear it or you scratch it,
> It's impossible to match it,
> So take care, please, of the paint, of the paint.

The only one of her "boys" who seems to find his way to Lily's heart is an army captain, "Nicko" Jeyes, a foolish waster with a genuinely deep affection which draws something of the same kind from her because it makes him weak and wasteful of his life. Her family, drawn with good-humoured accuracy—common, illiterate, but devoted to Lily—would prefer that she should marry Lord Farncombe, a young man of pleasant manners and large income. A business man, a patron of the musical drama, "who has always taken a fatherly interest in her"—she and her mother call him "Uncle"—wants to see her with a title, like lots of other "Pandora Girls." He thinks "these tiptop families ought to feel jolly grateful" to these girls for "mixing the breed a bit."

"Look at the two lads who've married Gwennie Harker and Maidie Trevail—Kinterton and Colenroy; and Fawcus—Sir George Fawcus—Eva Shafto's husband; they haven't a chin or a forehead between 'em and their chests are as narrow as a ten-inch plank."

Farncombe is "inclined to be weedy" himself, not much of a specimen of hereditary *noblesse*. Roper goes on cheerfully:

"I maintain it's a grand thing for our English nobs that their slips of sons have taken to marrying young women of the stamp of Maidie Trevail and Gwennie Harker—or Lil; keen-witted young women full of the joy of life, with strong frames, beautiful hair and fine eyes, and healthy pink gums and big white teeth . . . It's my belief the Pandora girls'll be the salvation of the aristocracy."

A true satirical comedy of manners, this, so true that it caused a flare-up of annoyance in musical comedy circles. Pinero was accused of libelling the stage. (Oddly enough no one accused him of libelling the peerage!) Mr. George Edwardes, proprietor of the Gaiety Theatre—the Pandora was the Gaiety under thin disguise—entered indignant protest. This did not alter the conviction of all who saw the play and knew the stage that the picture was correct—in its general lines.

Whether Nicko would have decided suddenly to stand out of Lil's way and leave Farncombe without a rival may be doubted. This generous resolve gave the piece a sentimental ending; it was necessary to

the author's scheme. Nor was it by any means impossibly quixotic behaviour for a man who had inherited decent traditions. It came unexpectedly, since it had not been led up to with the author's usual skill. But there was no need to quarrel with a development of character which provided a "happy finish," and another prop for the shoring-up of a decadent fabric, a "social system based on deference," as Walter Bagehot in his "English Constitution" pointed out with equal wit and truth.

The acting of the play was scarcely more than adequate. Miss Marie Löhr made the actress charming and attractive, but the part seemed to demand a harder, firmer touch. She was too much like the sort of young woman whom Farncombe could have married if he had chosen a wife from his own class. This was partly the author's doing. As his method became more natural, his characters lost something of individuality, they were not so strongly drawn; they were real people, but not people who would be noticeable; they spoke naturally, but seldom had anything amusing or exciting to say. In *The Freaks*, for instance, a play which links up with *Trelawny* and *The Mind-the-Paint-Girl*, there were a boy and girl whose talk was phonographically accurate and easy, but who left no impression on the spectator's mind.

What had *The Freaks* in common with the two theatrical comedies? Simply this—that it was designed to contrast public performers with ordinary people. In his satire upon the sort of persons who live in the suburbs and get knighted after making

money " in the city " and have " At Home " days, Pinero chose for his contrasts some members of a humble branch of the show trade—a giant, a skeleton dude, a pair of midgets, and a lady known as The Human Knot. The pretext for bringing them into the suburban home is that they belonged to a circus run by an English adventurer who in his will adjured his sister to be kind to them. They are kept there because of the giant's illness. As a result, the daughter of the house falls in love with the Skeleton Dude, while her brother asks The Human Knot to marry him.

However, this " idyll of suburbia " is not idyllic enough to end with their two marriages. *The Freaks* go off to more congenial society, preferring their own fellow-oddities to the City Knight, a desolating bore, and his Lady, a silly snob. The point which Pinero sought to make was contained in a long speech by the Dude when he found out that the girl was attracted by him but repelled by his occupation. " Who is a Freak and who is normal in this world? " he asks.

" Are there no Freaks in your list of acquaintances? Are all the women you like, and all the men you rub palms with, beautiful specimens of the normal—the Christian type?

" And yet you sneer at my poor grotesque companions who, in spite of infirmities of body and temper, have more true love in their hearts, treat 'em kindly, than seventy-five per cent. of the well-formed, and the well-endowed.

" [*Grinding his teeth.*] Freaks, are they? I declare

to you, Miss Herrick, that, looking into the faces in front of me at our shows, my hardest task has been to refrain from crying out that we ought to change places—*to change places*—the so-called Freaks upon the rickety platform and the damned sniggering spectators on the tan floor."

Walkley maliciously suggested that the Dude must have been in the habit of going to Pinero plays. The speech was certainly characteristic, so was the acid humour, which, if it had not been diluted by sentiment and pun-making at the expense of snobs and bores, would have left a bitter flavour behind it. Not even clever acting could make so queer a fancy successful. Perhaps the air-raids were among the influences which told against it, for it was produced in February 1918.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASSERTING HIS ARTISTIC INDEPENDENCE

"The radical defect of would-be serious playwriting is the defect that at a critical moment there is sometimes a ready, sometimes an unwilling sacrifice of dramatic truth to mere theatrical need."—FREDERICK WEDMORE, *in* 1893.

WHILE *The Weaker Sex* and *Sweet Lavender* were still running in London *The Profligate* was produced on 24th April 1889. This date marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of British drama.

Let us glance at the list of plays then being performed at London theatres. It will show us what the end of the old phase was like. At three houses Shakespeare filled the bill. The sugary-sweet and the dolefully-sentimental purveyed by Pinero in the two pieces just named, satisfied many tastes—and held out little hope that he would do anything but aim at repeating his success in these lines.

The Harbour Lights and *The Silver King* were melodramas frank and unashamed, bearing no relation to life whatever. Charles Wyndham and Mary Moore were giving in *Still Waters Run Deep* their well-known performances which varied scarcely at all, whatever name their "vehicle" of the moment might bear. Farce was represented by *The Don*, in which Toole rollicked through absurd impossibilities.

As for *Merry Margate*—its name sufficiently describes it. With musical entertainments, which are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, that completed the tale.

No moment could have seemed less propitious for the presentation of a play which "should by means of simple and reasonable dramatic deduction record actual experience flowing in the natural irregular rhythm of life, which should at the same time embody lofty ideals of conduct and character." So Malcolm C. Salaman wrote of *The Profligate* in his preface to its appearance as a book. He wrote also that Pinero "felt the air was clearing and the period approaching when the British dramatist might begin to assert his artistic independence."

To speak more accurately, the dramatist decided to continue that assertion of individuality which had begun when he wrote *The Squire*.

Did he choose now to deal with a grave problem of life—one of the problems which face every man when he enters the manly state, and which may be offered for the solution of any woman who has become a wife—did he leave the comic and sentimental highroads of drama for this more strenuous path impelled by interest in the problem, by preference for the path? Or did he merely judge that the time was ripe for a play of serious interest?

I suggest that he was driven to write *The Profligate* mainly by his sense of responsibility to the theatre, by his knowledge that change was in the air, by his determination that England should not lag behind while other countries went forward.

Sir Arthur once rated me good-temperedly for "wanting him to wear a label and act up to it." I had written about the surprising range of his subjects for plays, and concluded by saying that he seemed to have no particular fondness for any species or method of drama: that he took up now this one, now that, as his fancy and the fashion of the times dictated.

It may be replied—Sir Arthur made some such reply himself—that he is a writer, not of one mood, but of many; that it is stupid to expect him always to write the same kind of plays; that versatility is a merit, not a defect.

Up to a point that is all true, but when *Sweet Lavender* and *The Profligate*, *The Gay Lord Quex* and *Iris*, are written within a year or two of each other, can we credit their author with any settled view of life, such a view as impelled Galsworthy to write plays, or Sudermann, or Bernard Shaw?

It is a great merit to be versatile. But versatile authors do not, as a rule, leave a deep impression upon their age. Furthermore, an ingrained habit of mind must leave its mark upon everything which the mind produces. Over Meredith's work brooded always the spirit of Comedy: over Hardy's the Tragic Muse. Richard Feverel and Beauchamp both came to an end that might be, and generally is, termed tragic. But consider cases closely and you will find in each a certain freakishness of circumstance which is alien to the tragic manner. In neither case has the end been foreseen as inevitable. In neither case is it the result of conflict with one of the great obstacles

to the human will—Destiny, Providence, a law of nature, or a grand passion. In Meredith's books we saw man contending with his fellow-men, with obstacles which their conventions and prejudices set in his path. In Hardy's novels, on the other hand, the catastrophe is to be apprehended from the first. Humanity always "appears on the scene hand in hand with trouble" trouble not created by its own actions, but trouble which has its root in the very nature of things.

Now, if Pinero had an ingrained habit of mind, a steadfast persistency of vision, they would colour all that he wrote. They might tinge it lightly, or they might deeply dye it to a uniform hue. What is certain is that in all his work we should find some evidence of the point of view from which he surveyed existence. Any such evidence I must admit that I have failed to find. It may be my own fault, my own dullness of perception, but I have never heard anyone else claim to have found it, and until such a claim is put forward and justified I do not see that we can come to any conclusion save that Pinero has no particular point of view, and that his plays must be judged one by one, each on its own merits, not as a body of work expressing a considered and consistent criticism of life.

In 1889 he felt, then, that he ought to write a play on a serious subject, treating it seriously; not in the manner, half-sentimental, half-comic, in which such subjects had been treated up to that time on the modern English stage.

It was a courageous feeling, this of Pinero's, for in 1889 there were few to agree with him. It was considered not only unwise and unmannerly, but positively indecent to draw attention in the theatre to anything which was not, in Pinero's own phrase, "as healthy and clean as the veriest fairy-tale." For a good many years after this date "Ibsenite" was a term of reproach implying, in the person at whom it was hurled, not only lack of taste, but irreligion. To admit a liking for the "problem play" was to write oneself down in general estimation a raker amongst unsavoury garbage. Any drama that dared to hold the mirror up to Nature and to reveal what the polite world, in the manner of Mr. Podsnap, preferred to wave aside, was decried as morbid, unwholesome, unpleasant. Any dramatist who, in pursuit of better things, ventured to

> Take the suffering human race
> To read each wound, each weakness clear;
> To strike his finger on the place
> And say, "Thou ailest here and here,"

was convicted not only of tiresomeness, but of immorality.

Of course, the only immoral plays are plays which represent vice both as being attractive and as having no necessary unpleasant consequences, which vice always has. In a preface to a drama produced at the Comédie Française as far back as 1840, M. Walewski wrote a few sentences on this subject which sum it up very pithily and briefly. "L'immoralité," said M. Walewski, "consiste à déguiser la laideur de la

corruption et à parer le vice des couleurs les plus séduisantes, à trouver des phrases mignardes, des afféteries de mot et de style pour voiler la misère des civilisations corrumpues et des ages pervertis. Mais, signaler la profondeur de la plaie, se tenir au bord du précipice et le montrer du doigt afin qu'il soit évité, est-ce la de l'immoralité?" [1] Most certainly not!

Now in *The Profligate* Mr. Pinero set out to do just what the author of the play of 1840 did—to stand on the edge of a precipice and warn all passers-by to give it a wide berth. He set out to show, in a word, that the man who leads a dissolute life before marriage will pretty certainly have bitter cause to repent it afterwards.

> It is a good and sooth-fast saw,
> Half-roasted never will be raw;
> No dough is dried once more to meal,
> No coach new-shapen by the wheel.
> You can't turn curds to milk again,
> Nor Now by wishing back to Then;
> And, having tasted stolen honey,
> You can't buy innocence for money.

These were the lines Mr. Pinero set upon his playbill. They strike the keynote of the play as he wrote it. He would concede nothing to sentimentality.

[1] "It is immoral to disguise the ugliness of corruption, to trick out vice in seductive colours, to conceal behind dainty phrases verbal affectations, the wretchedness of a degenerate civilization, a perverted age. But to call attention to the depth of a sore, to stand on the edge of a precipice and warn people of it, is that immoral?"

He ended the last act by making Renshaw take poison. This was not at all a likely ending. But Pinero always had difficulty in ending his serious plays without either a death or an entombment.

The Profligate, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *Mid-Channel* closed with suicides, totally improbable suicides, not one of the people being of the sort that take their own lives. In *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and *The Benefit of the Doubt* Agnes and Theophila were entombed, one in a country vicarage, the other in a bishop's palace. Given their temperaments one is driven to believe they would have preferred a swift painless extinction to such long drawn-out expiation.

As for Renshaw, suicide was the last thing such a man would think of. Why should he? Because he loves Leslie—worships her; because "in all the world there is nothing for me but you—you make my day or my night by the opening or the closing of your eyes. There is nothing for me but you"? Was that the language of a man whose nature had been awakened and purified? No, it was the language of a man "in love." He had been in that condition dozens of times before. He knew the symptoms. He must have known how soon they would wear off.

However, suicide was the ending of the play as Pinero wrote it. Renshaw soliloquizes over it for a long time in a maudlin way. He hopes "she may pity him when he has proved that he could not live away from her." At the last moment he pauses

"Supposing there is some chance of my regaining her. Regaining her! How dull sleepnessness makes

me! How much could I regain of what I've lost! Why, *she knows me*—nothing can ever undo that—*she knows me*. Every day would be a dreary, hideous masquerade; every night a wakeful, torturing retrospect. If she smiled, I should whisper to myself, 'Yes, yes, that's a very pretty pretence, but *she knows you!*' The slamming of a door would shout it, the creaking of a stair would murmur it—'*she knows you!*' And when she thought herself alone, or while she lay in her sleep, I should be always stealthily spying for that dreadful look upon her face, and I should find it again and again as I see it now—the look which cries out so plainly, 'Profligate! you taught one good woman to believe in you, but now *she knows you!*'"

That was the end which Pinero wrote and which he published when the play appeared as a book. But Hare was afraid of it. He did not object on the reasonable ground that it was wildly improbable, out of keeping with Renshaw's character. He felt, as Mr. Malcolm Salaman the critic wrote in commenting on the episode, "somewhat timorous of braving the popular prejudice in favour of theatrical happiness in the last act." Hare therefore "suggested to Mr. Pinero that, as a matter of expediency, it would be well to alter his *dénouement* so as to bring about a reconciliation between the reformed profligate and his innocent wife." How the Nineteenth Century speaks in those phrases! Pinero "fell in with the management views." This is how he did it:

Renshaw is raising the glass of poison to his lips when he recoils with a cry of horror.

> Ah stop, stop! This is the deepest sin of all my life—blacker than that sin for which I suffer. No, I'll not, I'll not!

[*He dashes the glass to the ground.*] God, take my wretched life when you will, but till You lay Your hand upon me, I will live on! Help me! Give me strength to live on! Help me! Oh, help me!

[*He falls on his knees and buries his face in his hands.* LESLIE *enters softly.*

LESLIE

Dunstan! Dunstan!

RENSHAW. [*Looking wildly at her*]

You, you!

LESLIE

I have remembered. When we stood together at our prayerless marriage, my heart made promises my lips were not allowed to utter. I will not part from you, Dunstan.

RENSHAW

Not—part—from me?

LESLIE

No.

DUNSTAN

I don't understand you. You—will—not—relent? You cannot forget what I am?

LESLIE

No. But the burden of the sin you have committed I will bear upon my shoulders and the little good that is in me shall enter into your heart. We will start life anew—always seeking for the best that we can do, always trying to repair the worst that we have done. [*Stretching out her hand to him.*] Dunstan! [*He approaches as in a dream.*] Don't fear me! I will be your wife, not your judge.

RENSHAW

Wife! Ah, God bless you, God bless you and forgive me!

[*He kneels at her side, she bows her head down to his.*

LESLIE

Oh, my husband!

It would be unfair to blame Pinero for the mawkish weakness of that ending. He must have written this final scene with his tongue in his cheek. "All right," he seems to have said to himself, "a happy ending you want, do you! Very well. Here you are. Just the sort of 'slush' you'll like!"

If the author's own finish had been a fine one, he might have been blamed for altering it. But as there was little to choose between them, such censure was unnecessary. Whether a dramatist should or should not take into account the feelings and the prejudices of spectators is a disputed point in literary ethics. M. Brieux on an occasion when he changed the ending of a play between the public dress rehearsal (*répétition générale*) and the first evening's performance, on account of the verdict of the dress rehearsal spectators, wrote a letter defending his action.

"The writer who changes his work is not necessarily" he said, "a weak character. He is not a man who obeys but a man who is learning. And there would be no merit in obstinately persisting in an error merely because the public pointed it out. One may say, indeed, that the public is always right. And, in fact, if I have written a play with the intention of convincing some thousand persons in an audience and if they protest, it is I who am in the wrong since I did not know well enough how to gild the pill to get it swallowed without a wry face. The masterpieces may be excluded from this rule, but I do not claim to produce them."

The folly of the public was shown, not in demand-

ing a happy end, but in not seeing that the end contrived in answer to that demand was not, could not be happy—or anything approaching happiness. Consider the circumstances. In a lawyer's office there is some little suppressed excitement. A wedding is to take place at a registry office round the corner. Bride and bridegroom will look in at the office first, bridegroom being a client of the firm. Bridegroom turns up first, rather the worse for a carouse the night before.

" There were some fellows at my lodgings, assisting at the launching of the ship—I mean, saying good-bye to me. They set light to a bowlful of brandy and threw my latch-key into it—awful fun. And then they all swore they'd see the last of me and they stayed and stayed till they couldn't see anything at all."

So he has " a headache fit to convert the devil."

Then a friend of his turns up at the office. Lord Dangars, one of John Hare's dapper, little peers with a dry manner of speaking and the look of a hard liver, has come to see how his divorce case (" they call me the Respondent, don't they? ") is getting on. To him Renshaw relates the story of his meeting with Leslie before she had left school.

He was fishing, waded into the water that ran through the school garden, saw her, made an impression, now all is arranged, through the head of the firm, Leslie's guardian.

When this guardian could not visit his ward himself, he sent his partner, a Scotsman, who in a soliloquy

tells how he, too, was fascinated by the schoolgirl. His way of love is not that of Renshaw and his kind. He " stammered when he spoke to her, because some women are like sacred pictures, you can't do more than whisper before them." He is naturally doubtful whether this marriage will be a success.

And just after the pair have gone off to the registry office his doubt is deepened. A young woman calls. She gives the name of Janet Preece. She happened to travel to London with Leslie and her brother the day before. Learning that she wanted to consult a lawyer, they recommended her to try Furnival's Inn. She wants a man traced. The man, of course, is Renshaw. She does not know his name, but she can make a sketch of his face. Hugh Murray looks over her shoulder and says to himself: " If the face she sketches should bear any resemblance to his, what could I do, what could I do? " And when he sees that it is Renshaw, he says (again to himself) " The wife! I must think of the wife!"

Needless to trace the steps by which the relation between Janet and Renshaw under an assumed name is revealed. It is not Murray who reveals it. He has done nothing to help Janet, will do nothing. He has let a month pass without writing to her, then written to say she must not count on his help.

" For the sake of one poor creature, your wife " [he tells Renshaw], " I have been dishonest to another poor creature, your broken plaything! For one month I have lied for you in act and in spirit. In the race between you and your victim I have given the

strong man a month's start; to her a month of suspense, to you a month of thoughtless happiness. You have taken it, enjoyed it, steeped yourself to the lips in it; and now, from this day, you play the game of your life without a confederate. Our paths divide!"

To which Renshaw replies, not with sneers and insults as at their earlier meeting, but by an appeal for sympathy and help.

RENSHAW

I don't ask you to pity the girl I have ill-used or the girl I have married—that you must do. But, wretch that I am, you might do a greater injustice than to pity me.

MURRAY

Pity *you*!

RENSHAW

Murray, a month ago I married this child. Perhaps then I was really in love with her; I hardly know, for loving had been to me like a tune a man hums for a day and can't recall a week afterwards. But this I *do* know—I have grown to love her now with my whole soul!

MURRAY. [*Contemptuously*]

Oh!

RENSHAW

I married her, as it were, in darkness; she seemed to take me by the hand and to lead me out into the light. Murray, the companionship of this pure woman is a revelation of life to me! I tell you there are times when she stands before me that I am like a man dazzled and can scarcely look at her without shading my eyes. But *you* know—because you read my future—*you* know what my existence has become! The Past has overtaken me! I am in deadly fear! I dread the visit of a stranger, or the sight of strange handwriting, and in my sleep I dream that I am muttering into her ear the truth against myself.

It was fortunate that this and the other stilted speeches of Renshaw were spoken by Forbes-Robertson's beautiful voice, and had his always interesting personality to season them. This was the kind of dialogue which certain dramatic critics used to praise as "literary," this was the diction they spoke of as "polished." That did Pinero a disservice. He would have learned much sooner to drop the theatrical idioms of the period and make his characters talk naturally if their terribly unnatural speeches had been gently ridiculed.

There are two orders of dramatists. One will hear his characters speaking and write, as it were, from dictation, another will carefully frame their sentences for them. The first writes dialogue which is recognized at once as lifelike; the second seldom accomplishes more than a good imitation. It took Pinero a great many years to pass from the one order into the other, and even to the end he was liable to drop, without intention, into formal phrases, and to use the wrong words.

But, making allowance for the fashion of the hour, *The Profligate* was a play the English theatre could be proud of. In its treatment of a subject labelled "serious," in its technical excellence, in its appeal to intelligence rather than childishness, it was well in advance of the standards of 1889.

Actually it was the first English play to suggest that the theatre existed for any purpose other than light entertainment and the presentation of classical tragedies.

John Hare told a little story in his speech on the first night (it was also the first night of the Garrick Theatre) which drew the attention of his hearers to this point.

His stage-manager had been arranging some performance in the country and over some detail had been hard to please. One of the stage hands said to him: "Why worry yourself? It's only amusement."

This was the general opinion in England at that time; Pinero was the first playwright to challenge it. He had treated serious themes before in *The Squire*, *The Hobby Horse*, *The Weaker Sex*. But these had been written in the prevailing conventions. They had been fitted out with "comic relief." Now the London public was offered a piece in which there was little relief, comic or otherwise, from the sadness of its theme. It was an experiment. If it had turned out badly, Pinero might (though this is unlikely) have left to others the task of following it up. It turned out well. The Garrick Theatre, built by W. S. Gilbert for John Hare, was started happily upon a prosperous career.

Pinero tells, by the way, a story of the building of this play-house, which illustrates Gilbert's peculiar form of wit. While the digging for the foundations went on, a spring was struck which flooded the workings. It seemed possible that the site might have to be abandoned. Someone condoled with Gilbert on this misfortune. "Oh, well," he replied briskly, "at any rate we can let the fishing rights."

The Profligate had not a very long run (131 per-

formances at the Garrick and three weeks in provincial cities), but it was recognized as a success in addition to being hailed as something new, something of value to the English stage.

The happy ending was, in itself, valuable. It set a good many people reflecting upon its gross immorality. Here was the stage teaching that half-roasted *could* be raw; that you *can* turn curds to milk again; and that "having tasted stolen honey, you can buy innocence" with a tardy repentance and a snivelling plea to be forgiven for the misdoings of an unutterable cad.

And, apart from its shocking immorality, consider the foolishness of calling the stage ending "happy." How could Renshaw and his wife ever be happy again, she knowing the life he had lived, he knowing that she knew?

It was not merely that he had lived what is called with unconscious irony "a man's life." That might have been forgiven, as Hugh Ardale's past is forgiven by Ellean; forgotten, even if Leslie only knew of it vaguely and had no hideous details seared into her brain. One can never tell of what a loving woman's heart may be capable.

Renshaw, it is true, is a kind of man for whom it seems at first impossible to feel much sympathy. On the very eve of his marriage to the girl who has, he declares, changed and purified his whole nature, he indulges in a vulgar carouse. On his wedding morning he shows no sign of shame or regret when Murray speaks of the smirched love he offers Leslie. He

jauntily says that he has taken the world as he found it, and prates fatuously about happy marriages being the reward of men who have sown their wild oats. Women, however, have loved such men, even when they have guessed pretty shrewdly at the truth about them, and will go on loving them without a doubt. Dissipation of the ordinary kind has been forgiven, and will be forgiven so long as men are weak and women steadfast.

But Renshaw was not the mere dissipated man-about-town. He was a betrayer, a seducer, as well as a common *coureur de femmes*. His character is the character of a profligate without any redeeming feature. It is not suggested that the episode of Janet Preece stood alone. No doubt "Laurence Kenward" had duped and ruined other poor girls under the cowardly refuge of a false name. But, even if it did stand alone, is such an episode ever to be forgiven by a wife who knows all its foul details and has realized with agonizing exactness what its consequences have been?

If Leslie could have pardoned Renshaw, could he ever have been forgiven by her brother Wilfrid, who has loved Janet and whose life is embittered by Renshaw's crime? No, between Leslie and her husband would have stood always the shadow of Janet Preece. Neither pity, nor the latent tendency in nearly all of us to believe in the efficacy of eleventh hour repentances, must blind us to the realities of things. For a mean, despicable, unmanly sin like the sin of Dunstan Renshaw there is no forgiveness, and

to make thoughtless people believe that a "happy ending" is possible to a story such as the story of *The Profligate* is to palter with truth, to do an ill service to the cause of morality.

It was this willingness to palter with truth and conscience which hindered the drama in England at this time from taking the place it had won in other lands. Thanks to Pinero, that hindrance was found in the way no more. The success of *The Profligate* strengthened him, stiffened his resolve to keep his country's theatre to the fore. He would not, he resolved, alter the end of his next serious piece, whatever the manager might say. He had won his right to have plays acted as he wrote them. He could count on the support of many who had up to now considered the theatre of no account.

For the first time a British playwright had been asked to read a work of his own at educational centres. The Birkbeck Institute, where he had been a student himself, was the first to invite him; others followed the example. There were murmurings against this novelty, but the experiment was entirely justified by results. Those who heard *The Profligate* read were not less moved and chastened than those who saw it on the stage.

It is a fine play in spite of its occasional theatricality. It is now and then a little too "well made" to be absolutely convincing. But the theme is handled with power. The story holds the attention firm. The pity and pathos of broken lives touch the heart with poignant force.

Upon the reader it produces almost as much effect as upon the spectator in the playhouse—in the later acts quite as much. This is the test of good drama now as it was in the days of Aristotle. In the Poetics we read that the plot of a tragedy "ought to be so constituted that, even without the aid of the eye, anyone who is told the incidents will thrill with horror and pity at the turn of events. . . . But to provide this effect by the mere spectacle is a less artistic method and one dependent upon the extraneous aid of stage management. Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense, not of the terrible, but of the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of Tragedy."

The Profligate is as truly a tragedy as any of the great dramas of the Greeks which showed men struggling in the grip of Fate. Fate is, after all, only the nickname we give to retribution—retribution for our own follies and blunders, or, it may chance, for the long-past sin or thoughtlessness of others. The Greeks bridged over the dim relation between cause and effect by inventing a stern Power, which compelled men hither and thither as it willed, now in justice, now in irony. We see more clearly that they are the victims, not of any agency outside themselves, but of their own acts. Destiny is, in short, nothing but Character. Here is the modern basis of tragedy, and upon this basis both *The Profligate* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* are founded.

The one, indeed, is a pendant, a corollary to the other.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY

"It is in the opinion of the best critics, the most remarkable work in the history of the British Drama during the second half of the nineteenth century."—M. CHARLES HASTINGS *in* "*Le Théâtre Français et Anglais*," *Paris*, 1900.

IN 1891 everyone was talking about Ibsen.

Not only those who were habitually interested in the theatre. Ibsen was discussed, condemned, abused, by many who had never seen a play. Leading articles were written about him. He was one of the topics of the age.

Discovered by Edmund Gosse and William Archer, the Norwegian dramatist suddenly became a touchstone of culture and open-mindedness. Suddenly, because in the year 1891 the first performances of plays by him which attracted general attention were given in London.

Two years earlier, *A Doll's House* had been played at a London theatre nineteen nights in succession; it had whetted curiosity about Ibsen among the small number who felt that Drama in England was feebly timid in its treatment of serious themes. The play had been dismissed by the critics as "morbid and unwholesome," as "dull and tame," as "a mild picture of domestic life in Norway."

That last description illustrates vividly the low in-

tellectual level of that final Victorian decade. When Nora went out at the end of the play, the closing of the door after her echoed, as we know, through all countries. *A Doll's House* was to be for generations a part of the Woman's Charter, a document of first-rate importance in sociology, in politics as well. Yet it struck a man employed to keep people informed of what went on in the theatre as "a mild picture of domestic life in Norway."

Now and then an article about Ibsen would appear in some journal of culture. At the literary afternoon tea-parties which were a feature of the age, he would be mentioned occasionally. But until 1891 there was a vagueness about him in the minds of all but a very few. Bernard Shaw, of course, knew everything about him, explained him to the Fabian Society in 1890, published an expansion of his lectures in 1891 ("The Quintessence of Ibsenism"). But of the nature of the revolution which Ibsen had accomplished single-handed in the sphere of dramatic writing, scarcely anyone in England either knew anything or cared.

As usual, it was Mr. J. T. Grein who led the way to a knowledge of what Ibsen had been doing. He founded the Independent Theatre and produced *Ghosts*. That play was the occasion for more newspaper invective than had been indulged in for half a century at least.

The *Daily Telegraph* was the leader in the anti-Ibsen campaign. Its dramatic critic was a Mr. Clement Scott, who retained at the age of fifty or so

the buoyant emotional ingenuousness that had made him a success in mid-Victorian journalism.

He was an excellent newspaper critic, since he loved the theatre and always said what he thought about plays, unless they were written by personal friends. He said it emphatically, even violently. He either delighted in what he saw or detested it.

By calling him an excellent critic I do not mean that his judgment was sound, his taste unerring. His taste was atrocious, his judgment ludicrous, he was almost always wrong. But if one read him day by day, one got a lot of amusement out of his writing, and one could tell what a play was like. Sound judgment and taste often go with dullness and dubiety.

When Clement Scott called Ibsen a dramatic impotent, a ludicrous amateur, nasty, vulgar, egotistical, coarse, absurd, uninteresting, verbose, and suburban, the judicious reader felt that something worth seeing had been produced. The charge that Ibsen had taken ideas which would have inspired a great tragic poet, only to vulgarize and debase them in dull, hateful, loathsome, horrible plays, sent one as quickly as possible to see those plays.

It was on 14th March 1891 that these phrases were used in an article about the performance of *Ghosts*. Not satisfied with this, the *Daily Telegraph* attacked Ibsen also in a leading article which compared his work to an open drain, a loathsome sore unbandaged, a dirty act done publicly, a lazar house with all its doors and windows open.

A list of the epithets used sounds like a set of

MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL

at the time of her brilliant unexpected success in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*

synonyms from Dr. Roget's Thesaurus. Bestial, cynical, disgusting, poisonous, sickly, delirious, indecent, loathsome, fetid, literary carrion, crapulous stuff, clinical confessions, gross and almost putrid indecorum!

No other newspaper equalled the vigour of the *Daily Telegraph* in denouncing what soon came to be known as the New Drama (those were also the days of the New Woman), but almost everyone took the same line in less furious terms. The *Standard*, a leading Conservative organ in those days of political journalism, called *Ghosts* abominable and scandalous. The *Daily News* found it " most dismal and repulsive." To the *Daily Chronicle* it appeared revoltingly suggestive and blasphemous. *Truth* described it as garbage and offal, and announced that " outside a silly clique there is not the slightest interest in the Scandinavian humbug or all his works," and so on.

Rosmersholm did not stir quite the same passionate detestation, but when *Hedda Gabler* was given in the month following the same shrill, stuttering chorus of denouncers was heard.

Sitting in the gallery at the Vaudeville Theatre one afternoon, seeing Miss Elizabeth Robins play Hedda, is one of my most cherished dramatic memories. The whole thing was a revelation to my young mind (I was twenty-one) of a new world of ideas (so it seemed to me then), and of a totally new method of writing plays. I recollect sitting there in a whirl of excitement and enjoyment and turning fiercely to hush down somebody who made a slight

noise coming in while a tense scene was being played. That day I ranged myself on the side of the New Drama. I had not seen the other plays. *Hedda* was enough.

Very soon the Clement Scott attitude became a joke. Ibsen was accepted as a new force. He might or might not be a thinker with a fresh philosophy to offer, but at all events he was a stage-craftsman of such power and enterprise that he showed up the prevailing dramatic methods as childish and silly.

At that time the "soliloquy" was still tolerated. In *The Profligate* (1889) even Pinero made his characters talk to themselves, an easier plan to convey information to the audience than bringing it out in the course of dialogue. The arm of coincidence was permitted then to be very long indeed. Consistency of character was sacrificed often to exigency of plot. Plays were built up on situations which would have been demolished at once if misunderstandings had been dealt with in a simple natural way.

In stagecraft Pinero had long been ahead of his rivals. Now before any of them he sensed the change that was to come. He saw that the same force which was enlarging the novelist's field would widen the scope of the playwright (it was soon to make newspapers touch life at a great many points instead of at a few only). *Robert Elsmere*, published three years before (1888), had set a fashion of "novels with a purpose." Kipling had begun that series of his early (and best) works which gave the knock-out blow to the three-volume novel. Alfred Harmsworth was

already meditating his revolutionary onslaught on the sleepy, stodgy Press. The time-spirit touched Pinero. He felt that it was his duty to respond. The British Stage must not remain outside the general movement. He must put it into that movement.

It was a task he did not greatly care for. By temperament he was more akin to Clement Scott than to admirers of Ibsen. Had he felt no call to carry on the work of Irving, he would never have forsaken the sentimental for what was then called the "sordid" drama. He would have stuck to Romance and left Realism to others. But he had set his hand to the plough; he would not turn back. He set to work on a play which should be both freer than usual in its treatment of a theme that would certainly be called "daring" (one of the favourite critical adjectives of those days), and which should also come nearer to the New Drama's technique.

He worked as usual carefully, slowly. Construction still came before character. He made the pieces of his box fit almost too well. But for the first time character was allowed to develop naturally and to appear, at any rate, to be making the plot instead of being subordinate to it.

The order in which the elements of a play should be placed, according to their value, had up to this time been:

Plot.
Situation.
Character.
Dialogue.

Now the Ibsen influence caused Pinero to give second place to Character, to let the situations grow out of temperament, and to avoid as far as he could anything which would cause spectators to say of the people he created, "They wouldn't have said this," or "They wouldn't have done that."

Comparing it with *The Profligate*, one found the advance very noticeable. It was as different as possible from Ibsen, yet "Ibsenism," to use the catchword of the day, made itself felt. It was entirely English in its setting and sentiment, yet *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* would not have been just what it was had the Norwegian dramatist's plays not been brought to London.

No doubt Pinero would have written on this theme. It followed in natural sequence to the theme of *The Profligate*. But the enormous difference between the "make" of the two pieces shows to what advantage he had studied the New Drama in the interval between them.

This was made especially clear by the immediate grip of the opening scene, by the ease and power of the necessary explanation to the spectators as to what the play would be about. Without in the least spoiling the interest by letting the audience anticipate what was going to happen, he gave them the feeling that the marriage was unlikely to turn out well, creating thus the true atmosphere of tragedy. An immeasurable gulf divided this brilliantly competent piece of stagecraft from the clumsy unconvincing first act of *The Profligate*.

In Aubrey Tanqueray's rooms, expensive rooms off Piccadilly, two old friends are dining with him on a winter evening. There ought to be a third. For some reason he has not turned up. Aubrey, a widower of 42, good-looking, rich, still youthful in figure and form, particularly wanted his three closest, best friends to be together on this occasion, for he has something to tell them. He is going to marry again —to-morrow.

This perturbs his guests all the more because he does not tell them the lady's name. He lets slip the phrase, however, that his marriage "is not the conventional sort of marriage likely to satisfy society," and this increases their anxiety. All he will say is that "the lady belongs to the next chapter and in that her name is Mrs. Aubrey Tanqueray."

At this point the missing guest appears. He is one of Pinero's men-about-town, kindly if his comfort is not compromised, amusing, disillusioned, entirely conventional in behaviour and opinions. He has been detained by a call from one who was a very dear friend of his mother's, an appeal he could not disregard.

"You know George Orreyed?" he says, "well, he's a thing of the past." He has just married

"a lady who would have been, perhaps has been described in the reports of the Police or the Divorce Courts as an actress. Had she belonged to a lower stratum of our advanced civilization, she would, in the event of judicial enquiry, have defined her calling with equal justification as that of a dressmaker. To

do her justice, she is a type of a class which is immortal. Physically, by the strange caprice of creation, curiously beautiful; mentally she lacks even the strength of deliberate viciousness. Paint her portrait, it would symbolize a creature perfectly patrician, lance a vein of her superbly-modelled arm, you would get the poorest of *vin-ordinaire*. Flaxen, five-and-twenty, and feebly frolicsome, anybody's, in less gentle society, I should say everybody's property. That is the new Lady Orreyed."

Called upon to give the young man's mother what comfort he could, Cayley Drummle has done his duty and then hurried to join his friends. Sir George Orreyed, he assures them, has ceased to exist. He has plunged into the waters of "the social Dead Sea," he will never reappear.

Aubrey is not amused by this story, as his friends are. He protests that "none of us really know anything about this lady," and asks if they will excuse him while he writes a couple of notes for the last post. His guests are left alone and Cayley is at once told the news about to-morrow's ceremony. He is even more worried than the others have been. "Deuce take it," he says, "the man's second marriage mustn't be another mistake!" They ask about the first marriage. He describes the first Mrs. Tanqueray. "A lovely creature, but one of the cold sort—all marble arms and black velvet." Aubrey had reckoned that she would thaw. But she didn't.

"I used to picture him closing his doors and making up the fire in the hope of seeing her features relax.

Bless her, the thaw never set in. I believe she kept a thermometer in her stays and always registered ten degrees below zero."

There was a child, a girl of nineteen now in a convent, and wishful to stay there.

"You remember his visit to Ireland last month. That was to wish his girl good-bye. . . . I think he must have had a lingering hope that she would relent, would come to life as it were at the last moment. For an hour or so in this room he was terribly shaken. I'm sure he'd clung to that hope from the persistent way in which he kept breaking off in his talk to repeat one dismal word.

What was that word?

"Alone—alone."

Aubrey comes back, the other two guests go, leaving Cayley Drummle; in a few minutes, after some hesitation, Aubrey tells him the lady's name.

Cayley walks up to the fire-place where he leans upon the mantelpiece uttering something like a groan.

"Come," says Aubrey, "we'll be plain with one another. You know Mrs. Jarman." (She was known first as Paula Ray.)

And he forces Cayley to go through all his recollections of her as the mistress of three different men in the course of three years. It is not a case of "a blind man entrapped by an artful woman." Cayley sees that and blurts out an apology "for the way in which I spoke of George Orreyed's marriage."

AUBREY

You mean to compare Lady Orreyed with Miss Ray? [*Drummle is silent.*] Oh, of course. To you Cayley, all women who have been roughly treated, and who dare to survive by borrowing a little of our philosophy, are alike. You see in the crowd of the ill-used only one pattern; you can't detect the shades of goodness, intelligence, even nobility there. Well, how should you? The crowd is dimly lighted! And, besides, yours is the way of the world.

Here is the motive then. Not love, we are to understand, though Aubrey has "a temperate, honourable affection" for this woman. Rather is it pity. He is an idealist, he believes he can redeem her. Also he is a victim to a gnawing loneliness, we must not overlook that. Clearly Paula's company entertains, diverts him. But he is swayed chiefly, we are invited to believe, by the feeling that she has not had a chance.

"She has never met a man who has treated her well—I intend to treat her well. That's all. And in a few years, Cayley, if you've not quite forsaken me, I'll prove to you that it's possible to rear a life of happiness, of good repute on a miserable foundation."

Later that evening comes Paula to offer him a letter in which she has "given an account of herself," furnished him with a list of her adventures, "since—you know." He throws it into the fire. For a little while they sit and talk of the future. She has been dreaming of it. Of a dinner-party.

PAULA

It was perfect. I saw you at the end of a very long table opposite me, and we exchanged sly glances now and again

over the flowers. We were host and hostess, Aubrey, and had been married about five years.

AUBREY. [*Kissing her hand*]
Five years.

PAULA
And on each side of us was the nicest set imaginable—you know, dearest, the sort of men and women that can't be imitated.

AUBREY
Yes, yes. Eat some more fruit.

PAULA
But I haven't told you the best part of my dream.

AUBREY
Tell me.

PAULA
Well, although we had been married only such a few years, I seemed to know by the look on their faces that none of our guests had ever heard anything—anything peculiar about the fascinating hostess.

AUBREY
That's just how it will be, Paula. The world moves so quickly. That's just how it will be.

PAULA. [*With a little grimace*]
I wonder.

Two months afterwards Paula is impatient because her dream has not yet come true. She and Aubrey and the daughter are living at a country-house in Surrey. The daughter? Yes, for on the very evening before his marriage Aubrey had a letter from Ellean asking if she might come home. A dramatic stroke, that, to give the end of the opening act a sudden twist just before the curtain fell; to add to the

spectators' interest by making them wonder how this complication would affect Aubrey's venture.

Paula is bored and does not try to hide her boredom. No one has called. Ellean does not seem to care for her. Aubrey cannot be called exciting company. Cayley is at a house in the neighbourhood and may transfer himself to the Tanqueray mansion. Before this is settled Paula decides that even the Orreyeds would be better than nothing and writes inviting them to stay.

"What is my existence," she asks Aubrey when he demurs, "Sunday to Saturday? In the morning a drive down to the village to give my orders to the tradespeople. At lunch you and Ellean. In the afternoon a novel, newspapers, if fine, another drive —if fine! Tea, and you and Ellean. Then two hours of dusk, then dinner—you and Ellean. Then a game of bézique, you and I, while Ellean reads a religious book in a dull corner. Then a yawn from me, another from you, a sigh from Ellean; three figures suddenly rise—'Good night, good night, good night!' (imitating a kiss) 'God bless you! Ah!'"

Aubrey tries to comfort her. "In time," he says, "in time." But she knows better. "Do you believe these people will *ever* come round us?" She declines to believe it. She begins to wish they had "gone in for the devil-may-care café-living sort of life in town."

There, at any rate, she wouldn't have been tortured by jealousy of Ellean for having won her father's affection, by painful longing for the girl's affection

herself, by a wayward flippant wish to hurt her whenever she can.

She asks why Ellean does not love her, does not like her.

ELLEAN

Love is not a feeling that is under one's control. I shall alter as time goes on perhaps. I didn't begin to love my father deeply till a few months ago and then I obeyed my mother.

PAULA

Ah yes, you dream things, don't you? See them in your sleep? You fancy your mother speaks to you?

ELLEAN

When you have lost your mother it is a comfort to believe that she is dead only to this life, that she still watches over her child. I do believe that of my mother.

PAULA

Well, so you haven't been bidden to love *me*?

ELLEAN. [*After a pause, almost inaudibly*]

No.

PAULA

Dreams are only a hash-up of one's day-thoughts, I suppose you know. Think intently of anything, and it's bound to come back to you at night. I don't cultivate dreams myself.

ELLEAN

Ah, I knew you would only sneer.

The pangs of despised love make Paula more angry, more unreasonably and wilfully furious, when a neighbour, Mrs. Cortelyon, an old friend of Aubrey's, offers to take Ellean abroad for a few months. Paula thinks that this is a trick to get Ellean away from her. She suspects Aubrey of

having plotted it. For that suspicion there is no ground.

He is certainly anxious about Ellean being thrown with Paula. He fears the time when she may learn what her stepmother once was. He is alarmed lest Paula's careless talk may have ill effects on his daughter's schoolgirl mind.

"There's hardly a subject you can broach" (he tells Cayley) "on which poor Paula hasn't some strange out-of-the-way thought to give utterance to, some curious warped notion. They are not mere worldly thoughts unless—Good God! they belong to the little hellish world which our blackguardism has created; no, her ideas have too little calculation in them to be called worldly. But it makes it the more dreadful that such thoughts should be ready, spontaneous; that expressing them has become a perfectly natural process; that her words, acts even, have almost lost their proper significance for her and seem beyond her control."

But he has not contributed in any way either to the giving of Mrs. Cortelyon's invitation to Ellean nor to bringing off the visit she pays in order to make Mrs. Tanqueray's acquaintance. Instead of being pleased, Paula treats her with an atrocious display of ill-bred pique. Her manner alternates between "deliberate insolence and assumed sweetness."

MRS. CORTELYON
You know we are neighbours, Mrs. Tanqueray.

PAULA
Neighbours? Are we really? Won't you sit down? Neighbours? That's most interesting.

MRS. CORTELYON

Very near neighbours. You can see my roof from your window.

PAULA

I fancy I have observed a roof. But you have been away from home; you have only just returned?

MRS. CORTELYON

I? What makes you think that?

PAULA

Why, because it's two months since we came to Highercoombe and I didn't remember your having called.

MRS. CORTELYON

Your memory is now terribly accurate. No, I've not been away from home and it is to explain my neglect that I am here, rather unceremoniously, this morning.

PAULA

Oh, to explain—quite so. [*With mock solicitude.*] Ah, you've been ill; I ought to have seen that before.

MRS. CORTELYON

Ill?

PAULA

You look dreadfully pulled down. We poor women show illness so plainly in our faces, don't we?

AUBREY

Paula dear, Mrs. Cortelyon is the picture of health.

MRS. CORTELYON. [*With some asperity*]

I have never felt better in my life.

PAULA. [*Looking round innocently*]

Have I said anything awkward? Aubrey, tell Mrs. Cortelyon how stupid and thoughtless I always am.

After a scene like that Aubrey's nerves are on edge. They are not soothed by Paula's resentment against

the sending away of Ellean. She and Aubrey have a violent quarrel. She had agreed not to send her invitation to the Orreyeds. Now she will let it go.

"Let it go," says her husband. "I'll write to him by and by."

PAULA. [*Facing him*]

You dare.

AUBREY

Hush, Paula.

PAULA

Insult me again and upon my word I'll go straight out of the house.

AUBREY

Insult you?

PAULA

Insult me! What else is it? My God, what else is it? What do you mean by taking Ellean from me?

AUBREY

Listen——!

PAULA

Listen to me! And how do you take her? You pack her off in the care of a woman who has deliberately held aloof from me, who's thrown mud at me! Yet this Cortelyon creature has only to put foot here once to be entrusted with the charge of the girl you know I dearly want to keep near me!

AUBREY

Paula dear, hear me——!

PAULA

Ah, of course, of course. I can't be so useful to your daughter as such people as this, and so I'm to be given the go-by for any town friend of yours who turns up and chooses to patronize us. Hah! Very well, at any rate, as you take Ellean from me, you justify my looking for companions where I can most readily find 'em.

By the beginning of the Third Act the Orreyeds have arrived.

For three weeks the Tanquerays have not spoken to one another except at meals. The Orreyeds have disgusted them both. The baronet is a stupid sot, his wife a simpering doll.

"Somehow or another," says Paula, "I—I've outgrown these people. This woman—I used to think her 'jolly'—sickens me. I can't breathe when she's near me; the whiff of her handkerchief turns me faint. And she patronizes me by the hour until I—I feel my nails growing longer with every word she speaks."

"Then why on earth don't you say all this to Aubrey?" Cayley inquires. In reply she tells him she has been an utter fool; she has intercepted letters for Aubrey from Ellean and Mrs. Cortelyon—"out of malice, out of pure devilry"; and now she doesn't know what to do.

Cayley persuades her to confess. She gives Aubrey the letters. "I stole them," she says, "I suppose to make you anxious and unhappy."

He does not reproach her; for a moment she is touched by his forbearance. Then she is off again with her reckless, insane innuendoes, flouts and jeers.

Into the middle of a quarrel there suddenly precipitate themselves—the travellers. They cannot understand why Aubrey has not answered their letters. Why, was there anything special in them? Yes, the news that Ellean had suddenly fallen in love with a young soldier and wants to be engaged to him.

He has come over from Paris with them, he is at Mrs. Cortelyon's house now.

But in a few minutes' time he is outside the Tanquerays' drawing-room windows looking for Ellean. He finds her, he is brought in, she introduces him to her stepmother when she has told of her attachment.

Paula and Hugh Ardale stare at one another. Mechanically they say: "How do you do?" Then Paula murmurs: "Mr. Ardale and I have met in London, Ellean. Er—Captain Ardale now?" And she asks Ellean—in the best old theatrical style—to leave them so that she "can have a little talk about you to Mr. Ardale—Captain Ardale—alone."

The burden of their talk is "What shall we do? What shall be done?" Ardale proposes to say nothing about their having lived together for some time in London. Paula fiercely refuses. She must tell her husband.

It will, she knows, spoil everything. Ellean was beginning to love her. "She kissed me to-night. I'd won her over." She had made up her mind to start a new life "from to-night." "From to-night!" She echoes herself miserably. But she is "determined Aubrey shall know the truth."

When he does know it, he is distraught, but still he remains the considerate, kindly husband. He must tell Ellean that something has come to his knowledge which makes her engagement to Captain Ardale impossible. He does so and she guesses he has heard it from Paula. She turns on her stepmother, asks angrily why she was so very anxious to tell her tale.

From that she goes on to ask how Paula can be sure of anything she had heard against Ardale.

"You can only speak from gossip, report, hearsay! How is it possible that you——"

And then the truth begins to pierce Ellean's soul. Paula knew Ardale in London! She understands suddenly what that admission meant.

"You—you think I'm—that sort of creature, do you?" Paula cries, and then Ellean confesses she has always—always——

PAULA

What?

ELLEAN

I have always known what you were.

A frantic outburst from Paula, denials, demand for apology, is interrupted by Aubrey. He sends Ellean away and Paula tells him that his daughter has guessed the truth.

AUBREY. [*Bending over her*]

Paula, you must have said something, admitted something——

PAULA

I don't think so. It—it's in my face.

In vain Aubrey begs her to look to the future, not to the past. They will leave the house, they will go abroad, they will make a fresh start. Paula will not believe they could do any better. "The future is only the past again, entered by another gate."

"You're frightened to-night," Aubrey tells her; "meeting this man has frightened you. But that

sort of thing isn't likely to recur. The world isn't quite so small as all that."

PAULA

Isn't it? The only great distances it contains are those we carry within ourselves—the distances that separate husbands and wives, for instance. And so it'll be with us. You'll do your best—oh, I know that—you're a good fellow. But circumstances will be too strong for you in the end, mark my words.

AUBREY

Paula——

PAULA

Of course I'm pretty now—I'm pretty still—and a pretty woman, whatever else she may be, is always—well, endurable. But even now I notice that the lines of my face are getting deeper; so are the hollows about my eyes. Yes, my face is covered with little shadows that usen't to be there. Oh, I know I'm "going off." I hate paint and dye and those messes, but by-and-by I shall drift the way of the others; I shan't be able to help myself. And then some day—perhaps very suddenly, under a queer fantastic light at night or in the glare of the morning—that horrid, irresistible truth, the truth that physical repulsion forces on men and women, will come to you, and you'll sicken of me.

AUBREY

I——!

PAULA

You'll see me then, at last, with other people's eyes; you'll see me just as your daughter does now, as all wholesome folks see women like me. And I shall have no weapon to fight with—not one serviceable little bit of prettiness left me to defend myself with! A worn-out creature—broken up, very likely, some time before I ought to be—my hair bright, my eyes dull, my body too thin or too stout, my cheeks raddled and ruddled—a ghost, a wreck, a caricature, a candle that gutters, call such an end what you like. Oh, Aubrey, what shall I be able to say to you then? And this is the future you talk about! I know it, I know it!

The end comes quickly. Paula takes poison.

* * *

Now it is quite easy to point out weaknesses in that story. No one but a complete fool would have taken Paula to live in that Surrey country-house, and Aubrey is clearly not meant to be foolish. No two people placed as Paula and Ardale were would have allowed it to be seen that they had ever met before. They would have bowed or shaken hands, letting their previous acquaintanceship be forgotten. But, admitting these and other absurdities, allowing the arm of coincidence to be so long as to bring Ardale out of all the men in the world into Ellean's life, the play was greatly in advance of the general level of its period, and it did, as Barrett Clark claims, " bring the English stage into the European dramatic movement, with which it had no relation a short time before."

Mr. Clark says of it that " it was acclaimed with tremendous enthusiasm when it was first produced." The statement suggests that he has never read the newspaper criticisms on it, either in America or in England. When we come to these, it will be seen that he is a long way from the facts.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"AN INTEREST WHICH PAINS AND SHOCKS"

"*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* enlarged the province of the theatre."—M. AUGUSTIN FILON, *distinguished French critic.*

"It was the first play in the English language in which the dramatist dispensed with those aids to exposition—the soliloquy and the aside."—CLAYTON HAMILTON, *distinguished American critic.*

THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY marked the peak of its author's career. He had done nothing before that was at the same time so dramatically effective and so true to life. No play that followed enjoyed an equal success. With it his name will always be specially connected. For *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was a turning point in the progress (or as some might say the decline) of the British and American drama.

Of course that drama would have freed itself from the despotism of Prudery. It was not Pinero who struck off the shackles which hampered its free movement. The Spirit of the Age did that. But in every advance there is some one advancer ahead of the others. He should have the credit for it. Pinero did not order the tide back, but he was the first on the shore from which the waves were retreating and leaving dry.

The play was ready by the beginning of 1893. By early spring it was in the hands of George Alexander,

Photo by Window & Grove]

SIR JOHN HARE

who played the disreputable Lord Dangars, the wicked Duke of St. Olphert's, the gay Lord Quex.

then a leading actor-manager, successfully managing the St. James's Theatre. He and Pinero were both trained in Irving's Lyceum School. They were old friends. But even friendship did not induce Alexander to believe in the play enough to accept it at once for regular production. He doubted whether it would be a prosperous enterprise, whether " the public would stand it."

After much discussion Pinero offered to allow it to be played at a series of afternoon performances without any fee. That would test the attitude of critics and playgoers towards it. However, before this could be arranged, Alexander found he needed a change in his evening bill, so he decided to risk producing *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in the ordinary way.

Pinero would not have made such a proposal, coupled with such an offer, had he not been already disappointed by one rejection of the piece. He had originally intended it for the Garrick Theatre, thinking of John Hare in the part of Cayley Drummle and Forbes-Robertson as Aubrey Tanqueray. Hare declined it, thought it was " immoral." Or perhaps thought the public would think so. He was a little inclined that way himself. Also he had managed to refuse almost every play of note in his time, not on their merits as plays, but for extraneous reasons. He did not like J. M. Barrie's handwriting. He disapproved of Oscar Wilde filling his cigarette case from a box on the table in the room where Wilde was waiting for him one day. In this instance he did

Pinero a service. It is most unlikely that Hare would have hit upon Mrs. Patrick Campbell to play the name part on which the success of the whole play so largely depends.

In the spring of 1893 Mrs. Campbell was receiving a salary of £8 a week in a piece called *The Black Domino*, and seemed to have no prospect before her but that of continuing to play absurd heroines in cheap melodrama.

Indeed, even that means of earning a livelihood was about to be withdrawn, for the two brothers Gatti, who ran the Adelphi Theatre in the intervals of managing the restaurant called by their name, had given her a fortnight's notice, alleging that she had spoiled an egregious piece of claptrap by her weak voice and ineffective gestures. Nothing she said or did, these Italian gentlemen complained, got over the footlights; they attributed this failure to her instead of to the creaking mechanism of the piece.

The young mother with two small children, her husband in Africa, the stage her only support, was in despair. Where could she turn for another engagement? She had tried many managers without receiving so much as an encouraging word. She had been to Beerbohm Tree, asking no more than £4 a week for a chance to appear at the Haymarket (this was before he built His Majesty's). He "was hurried and nervous in manner" and said he had no opening for her at the moment. He excused himself when she had won fame by telling her that it had been too dark to see her face! It may be that the

unhappy young woman carried with her a tragic darkness in those days. However, Fortune had gifts for her which were richer even than she would have asked. Within a few months she had made the sensational theatrical hit of her time, was playing the chief part in a piece everyone talked about, could regard her future as secure.

One evening Mrs. Alexander and Graham Robertson, the painter, were at the Adelphi. They saw in Mrs. Campbell's acting something which had escaped the notice of the restaurant proprietors. The choice of an actress for the great part in the new play had not been made. Many had been called, none chosen. Miss Winifred Emery (Mrs. Cyril Maude) might have had it if her performance in the character of a mother had not just then removed her from the stage. No one else had proved adequate to the occasion. Now Mrs. Alexander had found the exactly right person. She went home, sang Mrs. Campbell's praise, insisted that she should at any rate be tried. In a few days the heroine at the Adelphi received a letter from Alexander asking her to call.

Taking care to look her best, she called and Pinero read the play to her, or rather, so much of the play as concerned her. "But surely," you will object, "he must have read the whole piece. How could she understand what it was all about if she only heard parts of it?" Nevertheless, it is true that she only heard parts. The whole of the opening scene was omitted. The author began at the point where Paula enters.

That is an instructive illustration of the state of the nineteenth-century English theatre. Actors and actresses were not credited with intelligence enough to make it desirable that they should understand what they were doing. They never had copies of plays to learn their parts from, only their parts written or typed out with the cues on which they had to enter and speak. It happened sometimes that they never saw the plays in which they appeared right through, and had only vague notions as to what they were about. Even the leading playwright of the age so far accepted its custom as to leave out the important explanatory scene at the start when he read the play to his future leading lady. He did, however, begin the practice of supplying printed books of the plays instead of merely parts with cues.

Then Mrs. Campbell was asked to read some of Paula's speeches. She took the part and, trembling, did her best. Pinero said that if she could act on the stage as she talked in the office, she would do! She went away with the offer of an engagement in her pocket. But when she joyfully told this good news to the brothers Gatti, they said that if Pinero and Alexander wanted her at the St. James's, she must be of some value to the Adelphi. So they withdrew the fortnight's notice and forced her to fulfil her contract by remaining with them and continuing to play in their wretched melodrama. However, it was so bad that they were obliged to take it off, and she was told she could go to the St. James's if she were still wanted there.

In the meantime the part had been filled. Paula was to be acted by Miss Elizabeth Robins, who had distinguished herself in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder*. (She later made a name as a novelist.) Mrs. Campbell heard this sorrowfully. Pinero was sorrowful too. So long as there was a possibility of getting her he had made up his mind that no one but she should have the part. He saw in her just the type he needed. He knew that the playing of Paula must make all the difference to the play. However, Fate and the brothers Gatti seemed to have decided against him.

But on the very day fixed for the reading of the play to the whole company the situation was changed.

On this day Alexander was lunching at a house in Portland Place. Pinero called for him so that they might go to the St. James's Theatre together. Alexander came running out of the house excitedly. "We can get Mrs. Campbell," he said, "we can get her after all!"

Still the difficulties were not all gone. There was Miss Robins waiting at the theatre to hear the play read, with the contract in her pocket which gave the part to her. Driving to the theatre, the two men talked over their problem. When they got to St. James's Street, Pinero said: "look here, Alec, this is your job. I'll go for a walk in St. James's Park and come back in half-an-hour to read the play either to Miss Robins or to Mrs. Campbell. You must settle which it is to be."

Alexander said to Miss Robins that he would tell

her frankly what the position was. "I'll put my cards on the table. You know the part was offered to Mrs. Campbell before you had it. Well, she has been set free. She is in the theatre now. What am I to do?"

Then Miss Robins made a reply which forces one to think nobly of human nature. She said: "Mr. Alexander, this is the chance of my life. It's also the chance of Mrs. Campbell's life. She is a friend of mine. I shall not take the chance from her."

When one remembers what are the changes and chances of a stage career, how precarious it is at best —when one thinks of the opportunity offered to an actress of imagination by such a part in such a play— one must bow the head with admiring respect before such generosity of soul. The world is the better for such unselfishness as that.

To her successor Miss Robins wrote a letter full of kindly comradeship.

"It is the kind of part," she said, "that comes along once in an actress's lifetime, seldom oftener, and that it has come to *you* is my best consolation for having lost it myself. You will play it brilliantly and your loyal service in less congenial rôles will find its reward in this glorious new opportunity. There is to my mind no woman in London so enviable at this moment, dear savage, as you."

The foolish gibe that the stage is a sure breeder of envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness shrivels in the warm glow of such magnanimity as that.

Engaged at a salary of £15 a week, to start when

the play was produced, Mrs. Campbell began to rehearse "on approval." This meant that if she did not give satisfaction she could be discharged. Not a happy condition in which to tackle a character that was something new on the English stage!

Nor was Mrs. Campbell happy in having to act with Alexander. For some reason she disliked him from the first: that dislike grew and grew until it became an obsession. To this woman quivering with quick sympathies and wayward humour his manner seemed "cold" and "official." She could not help parodying him, making fun of him even on the stage. Good fellow as he was, Alexander could be pardoned for coming soon to detest his leading lady as heartily as she detested him. That was later on, however. At rehearsals of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* he was annoyed only by her "irresponsibility," as he called it, meaning her decided preference for her own ideas as to playing her part, while all she had to complain of was that he treated her "like a child," and wished her "to recollect that she was not at the Adelphi but at the St. James's." Those who knew Mrs. Campbell at that time will never forget the tone in which she mimicked her manager pronouncing those last words.

As the run of the play went on, this clash of temperaments grew more and more noticeable. One night, Mrs. Campbell was seized with a fit of the giggles during the play. At the end of the act Alexander sent his man to present his compliments to Mrs. Campbell and to ask her not to laugh at him on

the stage. The actress sent a message back "that she never laughed at Mr. Alexander on the stage: she waited until she got home!"

So puzzled, bewildered by this treatment was the kindly, courteous George Alexander that he was unable to be fair to his leading lady. One evening, after the piece had run for seven months, Mrs. Campbell forgot her words. There was no prompter on duty. Alexander had to fetch a book of the play and give it to her. As he handed it to her, he muttered, half to himself, "The woman's drunk."

What caused Mrs. Campbell's loss of memory was her little boy's illness. She had been by his bed for twenty-six hours on end. Diphtheria had been feared, but the ailment turned out to be tonsilitis. Overjoyed with the news, but tired out, the actress went off just in time to play on the afternoon of Boxing Day, changed her clothes in a rush, got on to the stage and could not remember a sentence of her part.

The sight of the printed page brought it all back to her. She went through the First Act, then she went to her dressing-room and began to put on her ordinary clothes. Her understudy was ready to take her place. But Maude Millett—"dear Maude Millett" Mrs. Campbell calls her in telling the story—Maude Millett, as kind as she was pretty, and she was pretty enough to make the fortunes of photograph sellers—dissuaded her from showing resentment against Alexander in that particular way.

That afternoon Beerbohm Tree was in the theatre. He had come to see Mrs. Campbell with the intention

of offering her a part at £60 a week. Her original £15 had been doubled by Alexander. Now she had a chance to earn what in those years was a large salary. "Think of your career," counselled Maude Millett, and bought half a bottle of champagne, and made her friend drink nearly a tumblerfull of it. Mrs. Campbell went on and finished the play, and Tree saw her afterwards and made his offer. That evening, she told Alexander she would keep her contract with him, but off the stage would never speak to him again.

At rehearsals Pinero had been almost as much a trial to her as Alexander. He sat close to her, wanted to teach her every word and every look. "She bore it like a lamb," testified Cyril Maude, who was one of the company, "though to an actress of her undoubted brilliance it must have been extremely trying."

Yet Mrs. Campbell admits that "so far as trained technique went, she was an amateur," and has always been grateful to Pinero for his "gentleness" and solicitude at this trying time. He would send out for beef extract if she seemed exhausted and stand over her while she took it. His quick recognition of ability, too, soon showed him that he could trust her intuition. In one scene he wanted her to sweep all the ornaments and photographs off the piano (that they were on the piano illustrates the darkness of the age) to make spectators understand how angry she was. She urged that a woman like Paula would not be "rough and ugly with her hands, however angry

she was." The author said, "All right, my child, do as you like."

As a result of such indulgence Mrs. Campbell made what Cyril Maude, out of his long experience, calls "the most enormous success of any living actress." After the first of two dress rehearsals, at which no one was in front save himself, the author went to the Garrick Club and talked enthusiastically about her genius. At the second her performance was flat, stale, unprofitable. He made no comment. He seemed to know she was holding herself in for the first night. When that came, she roused the audience to a pitch of enthusiasm seldom equalled in a London theatre.

To say this is not to exalt her share in the success above that of the author. It was the play that gave Mrs. Campbell the chance to thrill her audience. A dramatist is dependent on actors and actresses for the presentation of his work. On them (unless it is thoroughly bad) hangs the momentary acceptance or rejection of it. To him comes the credit eventually; theirs is the immediate triumph if spectators are pleased. What those who saw *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* talked about was Mrs. Campbell's haunting beauty, her flashes of petulance and scorn, her wistful hope that the past might be forgotten, the stretching out of her affection towards Ellean, the sorrow which crushed her when she discovered that the girl by some instinct knew her for what she had been.

Some were inclined to hold with J. W. Mackail,

William Morris's son-in-law and biographer, that "the play itself is exasperatingly thin here and there." He declared that her "noble acting, just the sort one dreams of but never expects to see," demanded as the only part good enough for it, Shakespeare's Cleopatra. But when John Davidson the poet wrote to Mrs. Campbell "Paula is like an opal of many hues and lustres, with stains of life and wounds of passion through which the disastrous fires glow that shatter it in the end," he did not mean to attribute this merit entirely or even principally to the actress. He knew how much to apportion to the player and how much to the brain which gave the player material to work on. Still it may fairly be said that no other actress playing Paula has left the same impression. The list includes Elenora Duse, Mrs. Kendal, Miss Olga Nethersole, Miss Ethel Barrymore, Miss Granville, Miss Gladys Cooper. All followed more or less the lines on which Mrs. Campbell "created" the part, if that expression may be allowed. Duse put into it exquisite touches of her own incomparable art. "When she looked in the glass," Maurice Baring wrote, "and realized that when she lost her looks she would lose all, she looked suddenly and for a second fifty years older, and one felt that the act of suicide with which the play ends was not improbable—whatever else it might be—was, in fact, inevitable." But no other actress seen in the part got into it the personal distinction, the temperamental brilliance, which made it a thing of rare beauty in Mrs. Campbell's hands.

Mrs. Kendal took it to the United States for the first time. The story of the pained reproaches which she had to endure is diverting. The play was condemned by the Press as unfit for performance in an American theatre. "How a courtesan would look and act if married to a respectable gentleman," said one critic, "is not a subject to be presented on the stage." Another writer lamented that Mrs. Kendal who had "always been not only a good actress, but a good woman, should pain her admirers and risk her popularity after all these years by devoting her talents to the exemplification of how an abandoned woman would behave under certain distasteful circumstances."

Those who know what the American stage has become will find it hard to believe that such things can have been written about *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. The throwing off of all restraint which recent years have seen was the natural reaction from this pusillanimous Puritanism. The critics were even then out of touch with the general opinion of playgoers. Their shocked expressions of discomfort had no effect unless it were to stimulate curiosity. The play had a great American success—save in San Francisco which, a critic remarked, was "full of Mrs. Tanquerays." Paula was no novelty there.

Of the criticisms in London, that which appeared in *The Times*, written by J. F. Nisbet (author of *The Insanity of Genius*, which caused discussion in its time) may be taken as a fair example. Judge whether it can be called "tremendously enthusiastic" (the

phrase used by an American writer, quoted at the close of Chapter V).

"*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* may be unpleasant in its theme—this, indeed, it is—and the rank taste which it leaves in the mouth may, and probably will, militate against its general popularity; but it is written with undeniable power, and is worked out to the tragic issue with a stern and inflexible logic which fully atones for what may at first appear the somewhat gratuitous offer of the author to take his audience for 'a stroll in Regent Street by night.' [It must be explained that Regent Street at this time was the nightly prowling ground of a number of prostitutes.]

"The action is of an absorbing character, but it arouses an interest which pains and shocks, though, doubtless, for that reason it will commend itself to 'lovers of the revolting in art.'" [This was a hit at the admirers of *Ghosts*, *A Doll's House*, and *Rosmersholm*.]

"Mr. Pinero may congratulate himself upon having beaten the new school at their own game. Nothing more essentially hideous or squalid than this play has been set before the supporters of the Théâtre Libre or any of its offshoots. But let us do the author justice; it is written with a masterly hand and holds the spectator from first to last in the thrall of a horrible fascination."

This from the upholders of the old drama; they all took more or less the same line. They could not take the trouble to think themselves out of their mental

habits and prejudices. Nisbet was a man of open mind on everything that had not to do with the Drama. He had none of the illusions which seem to be suggested by what he wrote. Of that I can speak with knowledge: I knew him. Yet he was not insincere. He did truly feel that it was " painful " and " horrible " and " shocking " to present on the stage a story such as that of Paula Tanqueray. He did not deny its vivid truthfulness. He was so dominated by the Victorian dislike of truthfulness that he genuinely held it to be " hideous " and " squalid " to expose what he knew to be true.

Clement Scott's dislike of the play went far beyond that of any other critic. He " loathed and hated the story." He " detested feminism in any form." He was absent from England when the piece was produced. On his return he attacked it in a weekly illustrated paper, lamenting Pinero's change from the " well-balanced " play to this " ill-balanced " one and laying this at the door of " the Ibsen reaction."

He went on to compare *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* with a German drama and suggested, though he did not assert, a similarity between them. Pinero, angered by the tone of the article, at once threatened him with an action for libel. This startled and alarmed Clement Scott. He said he could not understand such a line being taken by " an old friend." Sir George Lewis, famous as a " Society " and stage solicitor, brought the aggressor and the aggrieved together and reconciled them—on paper. But the

breach was too wide to be bridged over. The " old friendship " was not resumed.

And while Pinero had to endure such epithets from those who had their faces turned to the past, he was no better treated by some who were marching with their eyes fixed on the future. William Archer intended praise when he said that Dumas " might without a blush have signed *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* " (to-day it would be abuse!); but Shaw could see little that was good in it. " When one notes the naïve machinery of the exposition of the first act, in which two whole actors are wasted on sham parts, and the hero, at his own dinner party, is compelled to get up and go ignominiously into the next room ' to write some letters,' when something has to be said behind his back . . . when one counts the number of doors which Mr. Pinero needs to get his characters on and off the stage . . . it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that what most of our critics mean by mastery of stagecraft is recklessness in the substitution of dead machinery and lay figures for vital action and real character."

That censure, like most of Shaw's, and like his praise also, was years before its time. No playwright then was using a more modern technique than Pinero's. He had already gone far from *The Profligate* and ought to have been given credit for that. He was to go much further yet.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BURNING OF THE BIBLE

"It is impossible for any serious student of our stage not to be deeply conscious of its present pitiable condition, not to be eager with all his heart to see a better condition of things brought about. We can hold our own as far as acting is concerned; we certainly cannot hold our own in the drama that is given to these actors to act."—JUSTIN HUNTLY MCCARTHY *in* 1892.

WITH *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* Pinero did a great deal towards freeing the British Drama from the bondages of Victorian prudery and the chains of antiquated technique.

If anyone finds it hard to believe that a play so mild, according to later standards, can have ever been ahead of its time, let the epithets applied to Ibsen be referred to: they will show that both courage and skill were needed in the struggle towards emancipation. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* thus had the effect not only of putting Pinero above all other writers for the stage at that period; it gave him a prominent place also among those who claimed for the new age then opening more freedom in representing life through fiction, than had been permitted in the age passing away.

This was certainly not a position aimed at by him. He was never at any time a rebel (save when he rebelled against the programmes supplied to pittites

at the Lyceum!). His way of thinking was conventional. He was contented with the old ways; he would not have left them of his own accord.

He did leave them because he felt that he must move with the times. That was his motive rather than an interest in what were then called "problems." So far as he had any such interest, it was concerned with the possibility of writing "problem plays" to hit the taste of the time, and to keep the British stage in line with the new dramatic movement abroad. It was a curious irony which pushed one so little inclined to be even an advocate of change into the company of radicals and revolutionaries of whose proceedings he entirely disapproved.

However, there he was, leader of the movement towards the freedom of dramatists to choose their subjects where they pleased. His next blow in the liberation warfare was eagerly watched for. When it came, it proved the truth of what I have just written: that he chose as subjects for plays certain phases of relationship between men and women, not because he had views about "sex" or marriage or divorce, nor because he felt impelled to picture these phases as a painter is impelled to paint scenes that stir his imagination. He chose these subjects simply because they seemed likely material for plays of the kind that were coming into fashion, and because he felt that the theatre in England must have plays of this nature if it were not to become insignificant.

"Timeliness of theme, of character, and of dialogue," wrote Barrett H. Clark in his *Study of the*

Modern Drama (Appleton, 1925) "is an important element in the writing of plays that are intended, as most plays are, for immediate success on the stage. The dramatist of the early nineties was not on the job who failed to perceive that he was living in an age of unrest. . . . Pinero, who doubtless cared little about anything except his art, was none the less on the alert to make use of such themes as were susceptible of dramatic treatment. He wrote a 'revolutionary' play about that dreadful type a 'woman with a past.' The time was ripe and the dramatist knew it." And then he saw the woman agitator attracting attention and he did a play about her.

If this seem barely credible, if it be objected that Pinero must have had a deeper interest in problems of conduct and character than this theory allows for, let us turn to the play which he wrote between *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and his next serious effort *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.* It was called *The Amazons*: it has already been described. In three acts of farcical romance the course of three love affairs was shown with humour and a touch of sentiment.

Mr. Malcolm Salaman, in his preface to the published play, spoke of it as "a remarkable evidence of its author's versatility 'prompted' by no more weighty motive than the indulgence of his own playful fancy for all the amusement it was worth." That is a fair claim. Pinero's versatility is proved. But does not *The Amazons* disprove the notion that he was deeply interested in those problems of conduct and character which he used as themes for the Tanqueray

MISS IRENE VANBRUGH

as the heroine in *Trelawny of the Wells*, a play which first revealed her ability and charm.

and Ebbsmith plays? Does it not show that he selected them in response to the instinct which told him that the New Drama had come to stay?

That is in no wise discreditable. It proved his wide range of dexterity. It testified also to his loyal anxiety for the advancement of the British theatre. We cannot imagine Ibsen or Björnsen, Dumas the younger or Brieux, wishing to write farce-romance as a relief after serious drama. But neither can we imagine them doing it with the wit and skill of Pinero if they had wished it. So we may say the honours are divided.

His third effort in serious drama was eagerly, even anxiously, awaited. That it would be theatrically effective was sure. P. P. Howe was right when he said of Pinero in his *Dramatic Portraits* that his epitaph ought to be: "He kept the theatre open." He could be counted on to supply entertainment, a skilfully spun thread of interest. Would he do more? Would he show that his grip on life around him had strengthened since he created Paula Tanqueray? Would a fuller understanding of the forces of the new age be reflected in his next contribution to the new drama? To these questions "No" had to be answered. The author had got further out of his depth. His play had striking merits nevertheless.

The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, produced in March 1895, was written (as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* had been) for John Hare. This time Hare accepted. He had thought the other too "advanced," but had seen a rival manager make a great deal of money out

of it. This was more "advanced" still, but evidently the public didn't mind plain speaking. Also there was a most attractive part for him.

This was the part of a disreputable but charming and witty duke, just the kind of figure which audiences like to think typical of the topmost rank of the peerage. Duke of St. Olpherts, he was uncle by marriage to a young politician who had left his wife, run off with a queer woman named Ebbsmith, and was living with her in Venice. To Venice went the Duke to see if "matters could not be arranged."

Lucas Cleeve, as played by Forbes-Robertson, was a handsome, aristocratic weakling, a poor mate, it seemed, for so forcible a creature as Agnes Ebbsmith appeared to be. Her history she related to a Mrs. Thorpe, sister to an English clergyman, who had recoiled with horror (that is the only phrase which suits the case) when she learned by accident that Lucas and Agnes were not husband and wife.

"Did you ever read of John Thorold—'Jack Thorold, the demagogue'? I dare say not. John Thorold, once a schoolmaster, was my father. In my time he used to write for two or three so-called inflammatory journals and hold forth in small lecture-halls, occasionally even from the top of a wooden stool in the Park, upon trade and labour questions, division of wealth and the rest of it."

Thorold was unhappily married. So were most of his friends (it is curious that so many fervent believers in universal brotherhood are unable to live at peace with their wives). Agnes took an oath when

she was a mere child that " nothing should ever push her over into the seething choked-up pit."

" Fool! When I was nineteen I was gazing like a pet sheep into a man's eyes."

She was married to this man, a barrister who for about a year treated her like a woman in a harem, and after that like a beast of burden. After eight years he died. Then Agnes went lecturing, " spouting perhaps you'd call it, standing on the identical little platform my father used to speak from, lashing abuses with my tongue as he had done, warning women against marriage."

This went on until her health broke down under it. After a month or two of hospital treatment she took up nursing. That brought her into contact with Lucas Cleeve. He was ill in Rome. She saved him, so he declared, by her care and the solace of her companionship from " dying of a miserable marriage." She brought him to Venice, where the doctors pronounced him cured.

One result of his restored vigour was that he fell in love with Agnes who, up to then, had been his nurse-companion only. This troubled her. She had planned a future for them in which they would unite together in a relationship far removed from passionate love. When Lucas bought an evening dress for her " sufficiently *décolletée* and with a mere strap for the sleeve " she asked disdainfully: " And when would you have me hang this on my bones? "

It was not the sort of dress she cared to think of in connection with their companionship.

"Rustle of silk, glare of arms and throat—they belong, to my mind, to such a very different order of things from that we have set up."

While things stood thus with them, the Duke enlightened Agnes as to "the real Lucas Cleeve."

The scene between them is the most effective scene of the play. It was brilliantly acted by Mrs. Campbell and John Hare. Her wild-eyed excitement, her voice running up and down a scale of thrilling tones, her feverish, passionate, yet always slightly cynical temperament made a perfect contrast to Hare's polished precision and over-cultivated, cool insolence. It gave them each their opportunities; it was intended to do so; they took full advantage of every line.

If the scene seems to-day a little over-written, one must remember that Agnes was practised in the use of pungent phrases, the Duke a man who had carefully cultivated his conversational powers. He asks her, when she refers scornfully to his reputation and character, to "give him an inkling of the popular notion of his career." She demurs. He challenges her.

AGNES

At Eton you were curiously precocious. The head master, referring to your aptitude with books, prophesied a brilliant future for you; your tutor, alarmed by your attachment to a certain cottage at Ascot which was minus a host, thanked his stars to be rid of you. At Oxford you closed all books, except, of course, betting-books.

THE DUKE

I detected the tendency of the age—scholarship for the

masses. I considered it my turn to be merely intuitively intelligent.

AGNES

You left Oxford a gambler and spendthrift. A year or two in town established you as an amiable undisguised debauchee. The rest is modern history.

THE DUKE

Complete your sketch. Don't stop at the rude outline.

AGNES

Your affairs fully into disorder, you promptly married a wealthy woman—the poor rich lady who had for some years honoured you by being your duchess at a distance. This burlesque of marriage helped to reassure your friends and actually obtained for you an ornamental appointment for which an over-taxed nation provides a handsome stipend. But, to sum you up, you must always remain an irritating source of uneasiness to your own order as, luckily, you will always be a sharp-edged weapon in the hands of mine.

THE DUKE. [*With a polite smile*]

Yours? Ah, to that small, unruly section to which, I understand, you particularly attach yourself. To the——

AGNES

[*With changed manner, flashing eyes, harsh voice, and violent gesture.*] The sufferers, the toilers; that great crowd of old and young—old and young stamped by excessive labour and privation all of one pattern—whose backs bend under burdens, whose bones ache and grow awry, whose skins in youth and age are wrinkled and yellow; those from whom a fair share of the earth's space and of the light of day is withheld. [*Looking down upon him fiercely.*] The half-starved who are bidden to stand with their feet in the kennel to watch gay processions in which you and your kind are borne high. Those who would strip the robes from a dummy aristocracy and cast the broken dolly into the limbo of a nation's discarded toys. Those who —mark me!—are already upon the highway, marching, marching; whose time is coming as surely as yours is going.

Not a real agitator's speech, many will say, any more than St. Olpherts is a real duke. No, but that was how Dukes and agitators appeared to the crowd, what most playgoers expected them to be.

Then the Duke reminds Agnes of her nickname: "Mad Agnes" which he learnt one evening when he went to hear her speak in the East End of London.

"We appear to have studied each other's history pretty closely," she says. He gives her proof that he has been studying her character too.

THE DUKE

You have looked upon my nephew as a talented young gentleman whose future was seriously threatened by domestic disorder; a young man of a certain courage and independence, with a share of the brain and the spirit of those terrible human pests called reformers; the one young gentleman, in fact, most likely to aid you in advancing your vivacious social and political tenets. You have had such thoughts in your mind.

AGNES

I don't deny it.

THE DUKE

Ah, but what is the real, the actual Lucas Cleeve? Poor dear fellow, I'll tell you. An egoist. An egoist.

AGNES

An egoist, yes?

THE DUKE

Possessing ambition without patience, self-esteem without self-confidence.

AGNES

Well?

THE DUKE

Afflicted with a desperate craving for the opium-like drug, adulation: persistently seeking the society of those whose white, pink-tipped fingers fill the pernicious pipe most deftly and delicately eh?

AGNES

I didn't—Pray go on.

THE DUKE

Ha! I remember they looked to his marriage to check his dangerous fancy for the flutter of lace, the purr of pretty women. And now here he is, loose again.

AGNES. [*Suffering*]

Oh!——

THE DUKE

In short, in intellect still nothing but a callow boy; in body nervous, bloodless, hysterical; in morals—an epicure.

AGNES

Have done! Have done!

THE DUKE

"Epicure" offends you. A vain woman would find consolation in the word.

The worst of it was that, although Agnes hated the Duke for telling her, she recognized the description as not far from the truth. Yet for all that she suddenly felt that she could not let him go. She was in love again, a "pet sheep" once more. So she would wear his dress, she would make herself as beautiful as possible for his sake, she would not repel him any more.

Thus far the second act. Up to that point the play held interest, was entertaining. From that point it lost itself in the drifts and shallows of loose reasoning and theatrical artifice.

Agnes had not been conceived as a complete character. Pinero had not made up his mind how far he could afford to shock his age. In truth, he was not sure how far Agnes could go without shocking him. He did not know her; therefore he could not

understand her. He never for a moment saw her, or anything from her angle. He did not even like her. She represented all that he had been taught to consider unladylike, unwomanly, and immoral. Having borne with her through three acts of naughtinesses he slapped her hard in the fourth and put her in a corner to meditate over and repent them.

Truly, Pinero was at this time in a difficult position. He felt that as a dramatic revolutionary he was called upon to be daring, but he did not quite know how. He was a champion of freedom who in his heart preferred the fettered state.

So, having reached this point, he had somehow to give the piece a conventional finish. Mrs. Campbell, a striking figure as Agnes, was convinced that she ought to be a real woman. She wanted her to come to an understanding of the truth that "through the agony of human passion spiritualized lies the path of freedom—not through denial or indulgence."

Agnes, Mrs. Campbell contended, should have preached "the doctrine of selfless, unexacting love, stern and unyielding only when baseness, lying and fear invade its purity." Her conversion should have been "a sudden revelation of the love of God, not a mere creeping back into the shell of a narrow morality."

Pinero said No, the time was not yet ripe. Or did the unripeness lie in him? Mrs. Campbell was right in feeling Agnes to be a finer woman than Paula Tanqueray, the part a greater one. She certainly lent a vastly impressive and fascinating air to her.

" It is impossible," Shaw wrote, " not to feel that those haunting eyes are brooding over a momentous past, and the parted lips anticipating a thrilling, imminent future, whilst some enigmatic present must no less surely be working underneath all that subtle play of limb and stealthy intensity of tone."

In those days the woman agitator was a new and daring type, the feminist with original, independent ideas, in revolt against sham morals; it was doing a service to the drama, to put her on the stage. She was a far more real figure than the " heroines " usual at the time. She and her theories provoked thought. And possibly Pinero was right. In 1895 the time may not have yet come for Agnes to be real up to the end.

What happened after her admission to herself and to Lucas that she was in love with him?

First, he began to talk as her first husband did during the first year of marriage. He wanted to give up their notions of revolt, independence of thought and action, trumpeting their relations to the world.

" Do you mean," she asked, " that all idea of our writing together, working together, defending our position and the position of such as ourselves before the world is to be abandoned? "

" Why, of course," Lucas replied.

What he foresaw was a life in which they would not be companions, co-workers, but she the woman, he the man. He was dreaming of " peace and pleasure, golden days and starlit nights, pictures of beauty and of love." They might even marry, if his

wife divorced him. He might want to settle in London again some day. In everything she acquiesced.

For, as she tells the Duke, this is her hour.

THE DUKE

Your hour?

AGNES

There's only one hour in a woman's life. One supreme hour. Her poor life is like the arch of a crescent, so many years lead up to that hour, so many weary years decline from it. No matter what she may strive for, there is a moment when Circumstance taps her upon the shoulder and says, "Woman, this hour is the best that Earth has to spare you." It may come to her in calm or in tempest, lighted by a steady radiance or by the glitter of evil stars; but however it comes, be it good or evil, *it is her hour*—let her dwell upon every second of it.

The Duke sneers, reminds her she once had ambitions.

AGNES

Yes, yes, you're right. Once long ago I hoped that my hour would be very different from this. I have seen myself standing, humbly-clad, looking down upon a dense, swaying crowd—a scarlet flag for my background. I have seen the responsive look upon thousands of white, eager, hungry faces, and I've heard the great hoarse shout of welcome as I have seized my flag and hurried down amongst the people—to be given a place with their leaders. I! With the leaders, the leaders. Yes, that is what I once hoped would be my hour.

Yet she was content that *this* should be her hour. At any rate, she assured herself, Lucas loved her as she loved him. Even this assurance, however, the Duke dispelled. He told her what Lucas's brother suggested—"a suburban villa, a little garden, a

couple of discreet servants, everything *à la mode*." He hinted further that Lucas would have agreed to that arrangement, but feared she would never make the sacrifice for him and declined to pain her by asking her to do it.

" That's a lie," Agnes cried. " His love may not last," she went on, " it won't, but at this moment he loves me better than that. He wouldn't make a mere light thing of me.

The Duke sneered again.

" Wouldn't he? You try him."

So she did try him. She asked about the possibility of his taking up his political career again. So far, he admitted, he had made no actual break.

She reminded him that he was spoken of as a Coming Man in politics. " *The* Coming Man often, wasn't it? " And when he talked about succeeding equally well in his new career—as a writer—she pointed out there was a risk.

LUCAS

Obviously, there's the risk. Why do you say all this to me now?

AGNES

Because *now* is the opportunity to—to go back.

LUCAS

But I don't understand you. You are surely not proposing to—to break with me?

AGNES

No—I—I—I was only thinking that you—you might see something in this suggestion of a compromise.

At this opening Lucas fairly jumped. The Duke, Agnes was forced to see, had been correct in his

estimate of the man. Delighted by her agreement to the proposal of his brother, Lucas went off almost gaily to see his relations who had come to "rescue" him. Agnes was left to sustain the well-meaning attacks of the parson's sister and the parson himself. They were more shocked than ever to hear what had been arranged. Shocked in a perfectly natural manner, befitting the perfectly natural types they represented. No attempt to make stale fun at the expense of the clergy. This parson was a fine, manly fellow, narrow, of course, in his opinions and imposing a similar narrowness upon his sister, so far as he could, but in no way a caricature, just a figure of the age, skilfully and good-naturedly observed.

Intent on "rescuing" Agnes, they begged her to go with them to their north-country village in England. The parson urged her to ask for help upon her knees and left her a small Bible. His sister adjured her to "get up out of the mud."

"Take that away," Agnes replied, pointing to the Bible, and poured out a fierce tirade against it for deceiving her long ago. She had trusted to it, clung to it, and it failed her. Never did it stop her ears to the sound of a curse; when she was beaten it didn't make the blows a whit the lighter; it never healed her bruised flesh, her bruised spirit.

"You foolish people," she ended up (beating her breast and forehead) "not to know that Hell or Heaven is here and here."

When they went out leaving the Bible, Agnes seized it, thrust it into the stove. For a moment she

stood, watching it burn, then with a cry, a look of fright and horror on her face, she snatched it out again.

This behaviour of Agnes came as a surprise. Nothing had prepared the way for it. She had not been brought up to read and reverence the Bible. At no time, so far as her history had been laid bare, was she a believer in orthodox Christianity. Could the stove scene have been dragged in to make a thrilling climax? Was it suggested by the incident of the burning of Eilert Lovborg's manuscript in *Hedda Gabler*? No one could wonder at these questions being asked.

And what happened to Agnes? After her strange conduct with the pocket Bible, one could expect anything. She now called herself a wicked woman; described the partnership in which she had engaged as " base and gross "; went with the parson and his sister, leaving a card for Lucas on which she wrote: " My—hour—is—over." When he followed her up to remonstrate, she talked to him about his wife whom she had wronged (although the lady had explained that she was weary of his vanity and pettiness, and could not live with a man so " greedily self-absorbed "). Also she promised that when she had learnt to pray again, she would remember him every day of her life.

No wonder Mrs. Campbell groaned. " The last act broke my heart." The first three " filled me with ecstasy. There was a touch of nobility that fired and inspired me." Agnes's earlier vitality, with

its mental and emotional activity, gave the lie to her lame and impotent collapse at the end.

Pinero had waded into water too deep for him. In the desire to be "modern," to show that the drama could be as "intellectual" as the novel, he had tried to put together a "new woman" from such scraps as he had read about her in the newspapers and recollected from lunch-table talk at clubs.

Yet the debt the theatre owed him for *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, its value as a declaration that the stage was not to be limited to the invention of mechanical-rabbit plays, calculated to appeal to second-rate intelligences, he increased by giving it *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*. Shaw, of course, made fun of it. He said it reproduced the peculiar stage effect which Pinero put across with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, an effect of intellectual drama, of social problem, of subtle psychological study of character. It was another specimen of "the new sort of play which Pinero had invented by taking the ordinary article and giving it an air of novel, profound and original thought."

While this was true, and while the play, judged by any standard but that of its own period, was a lamentably bad one, it was not, at any rate, a mechanical rabbit. Its author really believed in the conversion of women like Agnes, with their dreadful notions about marriage, by presents of pocket Bibles and by sending them to places like Ketherick where they had for company "purple heath and moss-

covered granite in summer; in winter, the moor-fowl and the snow glistening on top of the crags."

With all its defects as drama this play gave one more to think and talk about than any other of Pinero's works. Just because it casts into the arena of discussion a subject so important to nearly all the men and women in the world, it gives us fruitful matter for reflection, a mental cud to chew for so long as we choose to let our minds work upon it. Agnes tried to persuade herself that she was one of the exceptional women to whom this subject is unimportant. The process of her undeceiving provides the stuff of the drama. When she finds that this weak, vain, egotistical Lucas has no idea of finding in her merely an intellectual comrade, a spiritual affinity, does she at once renounce their compact of partnership? Her head resents the intrusion of the flesh-and-blood element, but her heart holds her back from any attempt at renunciation.

Lucas's feeling toward her is the outcome of passion. She has learnt to love him with the self-denying tenderness that seeks rather to offer service than to extract gratification. The greatest sacrifice that a woman like Agnes can make is the sacrifice of her convictions and ideals. Her love for Lucas persuades her to throw them over at the first thought of the possibility of her losing him. The Duke of St. Olpherts verifies, in his brutally frank manner, the impression of Lucas's character which has been gradually forcing itself upon Agnes. She sees that there is nothing for it but to surrender her own and

to accept Lucas's standpoint. She is not the woman to be content with half-measures. Her mind is made up quickly, and she acts at once upon her determination. The dress that Lucas has ordered for her comes into her thoughts. Only an hour before she has expressed her disgust at the idea of wearing it.

Now she has realized clearly the only condition upon which she can hold Lucas to her. It revolts her to submit to it, but she has no choice. She puts on the dress that has aroused her scorn; she transforms herself from a dowd into a beautiful woman. The effect upon Lucas is immediate. At first he cannot understand the sudden alteration in her appearance.

LUCAS

Why, what has brought about this change in you?

AGNES

What?

LUCAS

What?

AGNES

I know——

LUCAS

You know?

AGNES

Exactly how you regard me.

LUCAS

I don't understand you.

AGNES

Listen. Long ago, in Florence, I began to suspect that we had made a mistake, Lucas. Even there I began to suspect that your nature was not one to allow you to go through life sternly, severely, looking upon me more and more each day as a fellow-worker and less and less as a woman. I suspected

this—oh, proved it! but still made myself believe that this companionship of ours would gradually become in a sense colder—more temperate, more impassive. [*Beating her brow.*] Never! never! Oh, a few minutes ago this man, who means to part us if he can, drew your character, disposition, in a dozen words.

LUCAS

You believe *him*! You credit what *he* says of me!

AGNES

I declared it to be untrue. Oh, but——

LUCAS

But—but——!

AGNES

The picture he paints of you is not wholly a false one. S-s-sh! Lucas. Hark! attend to me! I resign myself to it all. Dear, I must resign myself to it!

LUCAS

Resign yourself? Has life with me become so distasteful?

AGNES

Has it? Think! Why, when I realized the actual conditions of our companionship—why didn't I go on my own way stoically? Why don't I go at this moment?

LUCAS

You really love me, do you mean—as simple, tender women are content to love? [*She looks at him, nods slowly, then turns away and droops over the table. He raises her and takes her in his arms.*] My dear girl, my dear, cold, warm-hearted girl! Ha! You couldn't bear to see me packed up in one of the Duke's travelling boxes and borne back to London, eh? [*She shakes her head; her lips form the word "No."*] No fear of that my—my sweetheart!

AGNES

Quick, dress, take me out. . . . I won't oppose you, I won't repel you any more.

It is a powerful, pitiful scene this. It is the tragedy of the exceptional woman's life. Few women, luckily for themselves, luckily for the continuance of the human race, are born like Agnes Ebbsmith. There are two ways of love—the man's and the woman's—though sometimes we see the positions reversed—the woman, masterful, passionate; the man, patient, tender, serviceable. But the two ways in their extremes are seldom brought to a clash so violently as they are in the case of Lucas Cleeve and Agnes Ebbsmith. Seldom is so complete a sacrifice of inclination and ideal called for as that which this scene presents to us.

This is a tragedy in itself, this surrender of the higher nature to the lower, the failure of a strong soul to escape from the common burdens of humanity. But there is an even more poignant sequel. For no sooner has the sacrifice been offered than Agnes finds that it has been ineffectual as a means of binding more closely to her the man who pretends to love her—who honestly believes that he loves her, so low is his conception of the tie that means so much to her.

It is a thousand pities that a drama of sincere analysis and great power, such as we find in the earlier part of the play, should remain merely a torso, a fragment, instead of growing under the dramatist's hand into a coherent and satisfying finished work of art.

The reason why Pinero could not write a modern play was that his mind was not modern. But he had an ideal like his master Irving before him. Both

were set upon giving the stage the best that was in them. Both lived up to their ideal. Never did Irving play down to those whose taste he despised. Never did Pinero write down to a level lower than his highest for the sake of the box-office returns. Thus he was always respected as a man, even by those who made fun of his performances as a playwright. Of scarcely one of his contemporaries could the same be said.

Henry Arthur Jones, the ablest of them, was never after his first successes more than a purveyor of drama which he hoped to make popular by carefully studying what made for popularity. No one accused Pinero of that. His failures were in no case ignoble. He failed not because he aimed low, but because he aimed high, too high sometimes for his perceptions and his powers: always with the consciousness of his mission, always with the example of Henry Irving before him.

CHAPTER NINE

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

"It has humour, observation, genuine comedy, and literary workmanship."—BERNARD SHAW.

WE lose in many ways by having no theatre in which all that is worth preserving in British drama can be seen. Had we such an institution young people—even young people interested in the stage—would not look blank as they do to-day at the mention of Pinero's name. It is certain that such a theatre would include in its repertory several of his plays. One would surely be *The Benefit of the Doubt*.

Looking back, I seem to have got more pleasure out of this than out of any other of Pinero's works. Like all of them, it gives delightful opportunities for clever acting: clever actors made the most of these. As Bernard Shaw was quick to recognize and to proclaim, the play was about people whom the author knew and understood. Shaw praised it in a *Saturday Review* article; he mentioned at other times his admiration for it. Yet it was not a great success on its production in October 1895, seven months after *Mrs. Ebbsmith*, and, so far as I know, it has never been revived in London.

I think its failure to hit the popular taste must be set down to the fact that its theme is not direct and single like that of Pinero's earlier work, but com-

Photo by Alfred Ellis]

SIR GERALD DU MAURIER

who made a hit early in his career as the gloomy tragedian in *Trelawny of the Wells.*

plicated and of a criss-cross texture; that sympathy is drawn different ways, and the spectator compelled to consider the nature of the situation instead of being allowed to start from a point at which everything can be taken for granted. Furthermore, there is nothing heroic about any of the characters. Fraser of Locheen is a dull fellow who has married the wrong woman. Theo is a poor, tawdry, flighty little person who has accepted the wrong man. Jack Allingham and his wife are an equally ill-assorted pair. Her jealousy makes his existence with her unendurable, because he has not strength of mind enough to endure and to convince her by degrees that her state of mind is absurd. Nor had he sufficient consideration for his old friend Theo to prevent him from compromising her reputation by stupid thoughtlessness. Sir Fletcher Portwood is a wind-bag, Claude Emptage a fribble, Justina little better than a minx, and Mrs. Emptage a fit mother for such children. Remains Mrs. Cloys, the Bishop's wife.

Well, in Mrs. Cloys there is an element which does approach the heroic, but it stops short at the approach. It may be heroic to flount the prejudices of the world, but it can never be heroic, however judicious and proper it may be, to shape one's conduct with the view of conciliating the world. And that, after all, is what Mrs. Cloys thinks about principally when she plays the *dea e machina* and offers to rehabilitate Theo in Society's esteem by taking her niece under her wing. What does she say herself? Not that it is a censorious, evil-thinking world, and

that no heed need be paid to what scandal-mongers and worldlings may say. Oh, no! that would not be at all in keeping with Mrs. Cloys' character. It is of the effect of her action upon the world that she is thinking all the time.

"Both in London and at St. Olpherts Theophila will be my close companion. In our little London gaieties she will figure prominently. At certain formal gatherings she will share the responsibility of the hostess. If any paragraph concerning our doings should creep into the newspaper it will concern the Bishop of St. Olpherts, Mrs. Cloys *and* Mrs. Fraser of Locheen. Oh, I don't think there will be many to wag evil tongues against Mrs. Fraser a few months hence!"

A kindly speech, if you will, and a speech wise from the world's point of view, but not heroic.

Now, the average audience in an English theatre likes the heroic in drama. The popularity of the melodrama is due to this taste more than to anything else. The average audience likes to see people performing noble, improbable actions. For one thing, these actions remove the play so far outside the realm of reality that the spectator does not have to think much about it either at the time or afterwards. It will not bear thinking about; he is not meant to think about it. *The Benefit of the Doubt* does not at all gratify this taste for the heroic, but it does make an audience think. It ran about 100 nights, which is as much as most really good plays can expect to do; it did not take hold of the average play-going public,

nor did it become fashionable. It has never been revived, though it is certainly a play which ought to be acted, and, if we had anything in the nature of a repertory theatre, would be acted frequently.

The opening is quite as clever and even more interesting and entertaining than that of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. With consummate skill we learn the whole story up to the point at which the play starts from the snatches of conversation in the Emptages' drawing-room while the verdict of the Divorce Court in the action of "Allingham *v.* Allingham, Fraser intervening," is being anxiously awaited. The arrival of successive friends from the court itself keeps the interest strung up to the highest dramatic pitch. By the end of the act we know the outlines of the characters of all the persons who have been introduced; developments are attended with keen expectation.

Mrs. Emptage, a widow with a son, two daughters, and a comfortable income, lives "in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park," a district of London which gives its residents some claim to be in some sort of society. The sort of society in which the Emptages move is frivolous, pleasure-seeking, slightly vulgar. The mother dyes her hair and touches up her face. Justina, the younger girl, admits to having been "just a *leetle* fast," but this trouble of her sister's has made her lie awake at night thinking. "Great Scot, Kate," she says to a friend, "suppose I got left." So from to-day she will alter her ways, not be fast any more.

This friend has brought news from the Court.

"Everything has gone swimmingly." No need, gibes the friend, to have "dressed funereally" (they are in black). Did they distrust the result? Did they think that Theophila "really may—really has —really did . . .?" Their half-mourning looks to her "as if they had deliberately prepared for all emergencies."

Then comes the loutish son to announce the verdict. He was not in Court. He heard it outside with his uncle, Sir Fletcher Portwood, an amiable, pompous, egotistical foolish person, who has wormed himself into a knighthood. Theo asked all her friends to leave before the verdict. Only her husband was to be there. So Claude knows no details. But Theo is all right. Sir Fletcher arrives to corroborate this. Justina sits down and rattles off the Wedding March. Mrs. Emptage wonders whether the judge apologized for the undeserved distress occasioned to her child.

Into this happy family gathering there is precipitated a sister of Mrs. Emptage and Sir Fletcher. She is a bishop's wife, not at all a Mrs. Proudie, not apparently a conventional figure. She has a sharp tongue, a critical eye. For eleven years there has been no communication between her and the rest of her family. Now she has come to see what can be done in this hour of "terrible calamity."

"We have been on bad terms for many years. Let's have done with it. I suggest mutual concessions to disposition and temper. . . . We're gray-haired women now—at least I am and you ought to be——"

they had better tell her how it all came about.

Chiefly, it appears because Olive Allingham is a jealous cat. They had all known Jack Allingham for ever so long. Once he seemed rather inclined to pay Tina—however, he married this—this creature, a little older than himself, and feeling that keenly. What was it she said?

" When the wife is older than the husband every fresh little line in her face becomes an acute pain to her, just as if it were cut into her flesh and renewed daily with a knife."

Those were her words. And she made life a hell for Jack with her jealousy so that " he fell into the way of rushing round to Lennox Gardens to Theophila and Alec to obtain relief from his worries."

MRS. CLOYS

And is this all?

MRS. EMPTAGE

All?

MRS. CLOYS

All the justification a jealous woman has for seeking to divorce her husband?

SIR FLETCHER

Not divorce, Harriet; she wasn't entitled to ask for that. Mrs. Allingham has been suing for a judicial separation.

However, Mrs. Cloys continues her inquiry and learns that this is not quite all. Jack Allingham used to go to Lennox Gardens when Mr. Fraser was in Scotland. He and Theophila killed time together, played bezique, both of them happening to be fond of cards. Once more Mrs. Cloy asks: " Is *that* all? " Once more to be assured that it is, and once more to doubt whether she has heard the worst.

"You see," Sir Fletcher explains fussily, "the lawyer separated the case against Theophila into three divisions.

MRS. CLOYS

Three? Number One?

SIR FLETCHER

The House friend, as aforesaid.

MRS. CLOYS

Two?

SIR FLETCHER

Bezique, as aforesaid.

MRS. CLOYS

Three?

MRS. EMPTAGE

Surely all this doesn't matter now?

MRS. CLOYS

Number Three?

SIR FLETCHER

Tannhäuser.

MRS. CLOYS

In Heaven's name, what——?

JUSTINA

That was nothing. Alec Fraser was in Scotland as usual.

MRS. CLOYS

As usual?

MRS. EMPTAGE

No, no—as he is often obliged to be.

JUSTINA

Alec was in Scotland and Theo had been to the opera with pals——

MRS. CLOYS

With——?

JUSTINA

Friends—to hear *Tannhäuser*, she had sent her servants to

bed and let herself in with her latchkey. As she was closing the front door, she caught sight of Jack Allingham on the other side of the way.

MRS. EMPTAGE

He had had one of his terrible scenes with his wife. Jack was in a dreadful state of distress; pacing the streets like a madman, in fact——

JUSTINA

He's a very old friend of all of us——

MRS. EMPTAGE

More like a brother than a——

JUSTINA

And Theo begged him to come in——

MRS. EMPTAGE

To calm himself. Simply an impulsive warm-hearted act on her part.

Unwisely he stayed till three in the morning, was seen by one of his wife's spies and—hence the trouble.

The outburst of indignation which this produces from Mrs. Cloys is interrupted by the arrival of—the happy pair. At once it is clear things haven't gone so—so "swimmingly" as mother and sister supposed. Theo and her husband have a whispered conversation. "Will you tell them or shall I?" and when Mrs. Emptage asks fatuously if the judge and Mrs. Allingham's counsel expressed regret at so malicious an attack being made on Theo's character, her daughter explains what happened.

THEOPHILA

Oh, Mrs. Allingham's petition has been dismissed, yes But Sir John Clarkson and Mr. Martyn, my other counsel—all my friends, in fact—were a little too sanguine.

MRS. EMPTAGE

Too sanguine?

THEOPHILA

Oh, much too sanguine. The judge was rather rough on me.

MRS. EMPTAGE

What on earth do you——?

THEOPHILA

Rather down on me—severe. My behaviour, my conduct, has been careless, indiscreet, he says——

MRS. EMPTAGE. [*Under her breath*]

Indiscreet!

THEOPHILA

Hardly characteristic of a woman who is properly watchful of her own and her husband's reputation—honour.

JUSTINA. [*Coming forward a few steps*]

Theo!

THEOPHILA. [*Disjointedly*]

But at the same time he said, Mrs. Allingham had scarcely succeeded in establishing conclusively to his mind . . . oh! . . . and he thought that even the petitioner herself on further reflection would be desirous that I should receive the—the benefit of the doubt . . . and—and something about costs.

The announcement causes consternation. Mrs. Emptage turns furiously on her sister for "coming after these many years to see disgrace and ruin brought on me and my family." Sir Fletcher declares he will be seen "walking boldly through the streets, dining at the House of Commons, supping at the Club." Then people will say: "Look at Portwood. There can't be the slightest foundation for this scandal about his niece." Claude laments

that he will be " a marked man now, every eye upon me, her brother." Justina supposes this " has queered her pitch for a season or two."

Husband and wife are left alone. At once Theo shows that events have had a sobering, softening effect. She tells him she is truly sorry. With an effort she says: " I humbly beg your pardon."

" For what? " he asks, rising and facing her.

" Why, for all the bother I've caused."

To which he merely replies, " Oh! "

Then she tries again. They haven't got along over well, have they? A good deal her fault perhaps. But she did so hate his place in Scotland—Locheen. She hated his pipers who, morning, afternoon, and night play in and out of the house. And his fancy for dining in a kilt every evening! Still, for all that, she will go to Locheen in August, after the season in London——

" Theophila," he interrupts, " there will be no season for us in London and no Locheen even for me, for two or three years at least. We're going abroad! "

That is his idea, to run away. We mustn't do it, his wife says. " Why, don't you see? We've *got* to sit tight here in town; we've *got* to do it, to win back my good name." They must convince people that they are a happy couple and that he believes in her implicitly. " Alec, dear old boy, how could you dream of cutting and running now? "

Stiff in opinion, he cannot be turned from his purpose. He will have no play-acting. Before he

goes among people to convince *them*, he has to try and convince *himself*.

THEOPHILA

You—you think there's some—some truth in it then? [*He makes no answer.*] It's true you believe?

FRASER

I want time—I want time.

To Theo this is the final blow. She decides that she can bear with this man no longer. She leaves a note, puts her wedding-ring in with it, rushes out. A few minutes later the whole family know she has gone—but where? It is Mrs. Cloys who guesses. In a postscript to her note, asking Justina to give the ring to her husband, Theo wrote: "Jack Allingham would not treat a woman so like dirt." Probably she has gone to him. They must go after her. No time to lose.

Actually they reach Allingham's cottage in Surrey before her. He has already had one visitor—his wife. Olive is anxious to try and patch up some sort of a reconciliation. She is suspicious, jealous, impossible as ever. But she has suffered and "in her heart, always in her heart," he takes first place, she says. But oh, how hard her lot has been! "There can be no punishment for jealous women in another world; we are damned in this."

When Mrs. Cloys, Sir Fletcher and Claude arrive, they are as much surprised to find Mrs. Allingham there as she is to see them. It is difficult for them to explain what they want. The situation is embarrassing for everybody, and incidentally most

amusing to the spectator. At last it comes to a head. A note is brought in from Theo. She asks if Jack can see her—on a matter of business. He reads the note aloud. He says he cannot see her. But Olive interposes here. She sees an opportunity for the quieting of her tortured imagination. If the relations between Jack and Theo were entirely innocent, and if the judge was right in giving them "the benefit of the doubt," let them prove it now. Let Theo be admitted and let her talk to Jack, imagining they are quite alone, while Mrs. Allingham is concealed in the adjoining room. For the sake of peace Allingham consents. Theo's relatives are bundled into the dining-room, Olive takes up her position in the library, Theo is ushered in.

At first the result of the experiment justifies Allingham in permitting it. Theo explains her position. Her husband, to whom she looked to stand by her, has failed. He doubts her innocence; instead of facing the world boldly, he proposes to take her abroad. Therefore she has done, she says, with Fraser of Locheen.

"You know there's always a moment in the lives of a man and woman who are tied to each other when the man has a chance of making the woman really, really his own property. It's only a moment; if he lets the chance slip it's gone—it never comes back. I fancy my husband had *his* chance to-day. If he had just put his hand on my shoulder this afternoon and said, 'You fool, you don't deserve it, for your stupidity, but I'll try to save you'; if he had said something, anything of the kind to me, I think

I could have gone down on my knees to him and——. But he stared at the carpet and held on to his head and moaned out that he must have time, time!"

What Theo says about her friendship with Jack is more than enough to convince Mrs. Allingham, but yet she delays to strike the bell which was to be the sign that she had heard enough. At last Allingham persuades Mrs. Fraser, half-fainting as she is, to drink a glass of champagne, and then another. She has eaten nothing all day, she is beside herself with excitement and fatigue, the wine affects her brain at once. She becomes loud and slangy and confidential as to her future, and then, worked up to a state of delirium, she wildly begs Jack to fly with her. At this moment her relations, considering that the interview has lasted quite long enough, knock loudly for admittance. Their appearance naturally bewilders Theo, and before she has recovered from this shock she receives another—Mrs. Allingham reveals herself. Theo understands the plot that has been laid for her, her mind gives way. As the curtain descends upon the act she falls in a swoon at Allingham's feet.

It is a situation full of significance, charged with dramatic intensity. The whole act is brilliant in invention and construction, and this scene forms a climax to it that could not be more powerful. It has, however, this one drawback—it makes the writing of the third act an extraordinarily difficult task. The solution of the problem is found eventually, as I have already indicated, by Mrs. Cloys, and this solution seemed to many critics to be weak and inconclusive.

It is inconclusive, certainly. No play that deals sincerely with human beings can be brought to a "conclusive" finish unless all the characters are killed off. Nothing in life is ever final—except death. But I cannot see that it is a weak ending. The charge of weakness seems to me to be the direct outcome of the hankering after the heroic which I remarked upon a few pages back. It is a natural ending. It is just such a compromise as the English nature loves in practice, however much it may prefer, in theory, fireworks and the beating of the breast. They are ordinary people, and this is an ordinary expedient for getting them out of their difficulties.

You may, if you like, hold the opinion that neither Theo and Fraser, nor Mrs. Allingham and Jack, could ever live happily together. But you must not imagine that Mr. Pinero said or thought they could. He does not pretend to leave them in the way of living happily ever after. He merely closes the particular episode in their history with which his play has been concerned.

I have never heard anyone suggest a more natural or a more effective ending, however much they may have disliked the ending conceived by Mr. Pinero. And, whatever has been urged against the conception, I have never heard anyone deny the skilful treatment of the last act of *The Benefit of the Doubt*. The interest is kept up with wonderful dexterity, and though we do not get any further light upon the characters of the four people whose fortunes we follow, yet they all behave as we should expect them to

behave, knowing them already as we do. And really, after the two preceding acts, there is nothing more to be done in the way of revealing character. By his daring expedient of the champagne Mr. Pinero has opened to us the mind and heart even of the complex Theo, a tawdry little person, as I have said, who might seem at first scarcely worth studying even as a specimen of a large but not very interesting class. But the dramatist, like the naturalist, can find points of interest in every specimen that he places under the glass.

Here, for instance, we have Theo proving to us the eternal truth that between a man and a woman of presentable appearance and of anything like an equal age there can never exist a friendship which lacks altogether the disturbing element of sex. She and Jack Allingham have imagined honestly that "there never was one single thought of anything but friendship on either side." But the something else was there, as it always must be, whether the man and the woman know it or not, and they very often do not know it.

This may seem incredible to the people who think that all the mysteries of life can be solved by accepting the basest explanations of them. But it is a fact that must be apparent to anyone who has studied human nature as closely, for example, as Mr. Pinero has studied it. As soon as Theo is thrown off her balance the something that has been at the back of her mind emerges into consciousness. The result is her delirious appeal to Jack. Her husband tells her

that she was not herself, that the fatigue of the day and the preceding days, the excitement, the wine, had taken away her real personality. She replies, truly enough, that it was, on the contrary, her real personality which revealed itself. "It was myself, the dregs of myself, that came to the top last night."

The revelation is a bitter surprise, but it bids fair to leave a lasting effect for good upon Theo's nature. It is in many a case a sudden illuminating flash like this which alters the whole course of a life.

Of course the champagne was a block of offence to numbers of people. The sight of a woman affected by alcohol is so terrible and so revolting that the use of such a device certainly ought to be carefully hedged about. But in this instance the device had a definite purpose to serve, a purpose which could have been achieved by no other means. Further, it was introduced with so careful a hand that it could not be regarded as offensive by anyone who judged the play as a whole. Interesting as *The Benefit of the Doubt* is to read, it must be seen upon the stage to be fully appreciated. Until we have a theatre which shall form a repertory of pieces, and play them all in turn, adding to them gradually as time goes by, we shall be unable to judge fairly the lifework of any British dramatist of our own time. And not only is the student of the drama a loser by the absence of any machinery for keeping modern plays before the world; the dramatist must be sorely hindered and discouraged as well. If his effort is merely to be a nine-days wonder, to occupy the boards for a season

and then to be laid aside and forgotten, how can we expect him to put his best work into it? "For a spirit of any delicacy and dignity," wrote Matthew Arnold in his essay on Joubert, "what a fate, if he could foresee it, to be an oracle of one generation and then of little or no account for ever." But what a vastly more despicable fate to entertain a few hundred theatre-fulls of playgoers and then to pass out of mind!

Of Sir Fletcher Portwood I havesaid a word or two, but not enough to do justice to one of the most comical portraits Mr. Pinero has drawn in any of his plays. Sir Fletcher as Cyril Maude played him, was a perpetual joy. His cheery self-assertion and pomposity are hit off to the life. What a delicious scene that is in which he explains the true inwardness of his niece's acquittal.

MRS. TWELVES

It has been awfully reassuring to see you beaming in court, Sir Fletcher.

SIR FLETCHER

Ha! I daresay my attitude has been remarked. Beaming? Why not? I've had no doubt as to the result.

MRS. TWELVES

No doubt of Theo's innocence—of course not.

SIR FLETCHER

Innocent; that goes without saying—my niece. But the result, in any case, would have been much the same, I venture to think.

MRS. TWELVES

Really?

SIR FLETCHER

You see, my own public position, if I may speak of it——

MRS. TWELVES

Oh, yes.

SIR FLETCHER. [*Smiling*]

And I happen to know the judge—slightly perhaps; but there it is.

MRS. TWELVES

But judges are not influenced by considerations of that kind?

SIR FLETCHER

Heaven forbid I should say a word against our method of administering law in this country. The House knows my opinion of the English Judicial Bench. At the same time judges are mortal—I have never concealed that from myself; and Sir William and I have met. [*To* CLAUDE.] You saw the judge look at me this morning, Claude?

CLAUDE

No.

SIR FLETCHER

No? Oh, yes, and I half smiled in return. Yesterday I couldn't catch his eye, but to-day I've been half smiling at him all through the proceedings.

Again, Sir Fletcher's fussy anxiety in the last act to " arbitrate " between the husbands and the wives is vastly entertaining. He is a recognizable figure in modern life, this respectable nonentity, who began to " apply the lever to the mountain " at an early age, and who ends with a seat in Parliament and a knighthood. Thus, he is not only amusing but a valuable record of a contemporary type. Claude Emptage is very humorously sketched in also, and is equally true to life. He has all his uncle's sense of self-importance without the pushing energy which has made Sir Fletcher's position.

All through the play one is struck by Pinero's

knowledge of stage effect, of the thousand little ways in which a dramatist can keep his audience interested and in a good humour. Even when he introduces a servant for no more than a moment he can contrive to suggest character and to create amusement without hindering the development of the plot or deliberately turning aside to be funny. Consider the manservant Quaife, for example. His wife is "exceedingly healthy for a stout person"; the boy is not ready to carry bags to the station, but he "can be worried till he's ready." This may be called the mint and anise and cummin of play-writing, scarcely worth mentioning in comparison with the weightier matters of the dramatist's art. But it all has its effect in building up a solid impression and creating an atmosphere of reality.

There will, to revert for a moment to the main current of the play, be always people who shrink from looking upon the petty tragedies of life with the satirist's eye. Such people, while they are filled with admiration for *The Profligate* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, find in *The Benefit of the Doubt* a flavour that grates upon their palate. The same people would no doubt call Thackeray "cynical." They would avow their liking for plays either avowedly comic and light-hearted, or else cast throughout in a serious mould. But they forget that life is of a tangled web, good and ill together, serious and comic elements inextricably interwoven, and that often we know not whether to laugh or to cry at the fantastic tricks of our fellow-creatures. Merely to laugh at the

troubles of the Frasers and the Allinghams would be to bring our merriment under the sentence of Solomon: 'twould be but the crackling of thorns under the pot. And yet to deal in a tragic spirit with Theo and her husband would be to dignify them unduly, and would point to faulty perspective in a dramatist's mental picture of life. They have their moments of exaltation, as Becky Sharp and Rawdon, for example, have theirs. Rawdon rises to moral grandeur when he flings the jewel at Lord Steyne. Every now and then Becky reveals some trait that seems to put her whole character on a higher plane. We forget Theo's tawdry nature when she falls senseless after realizing the full extent of her half-delirious indiscretions at the Epsom cottage. But it showed a just estimate, on Mr. Pinero's part, of the theme dealt with in *The Benefit of the Doubt* that he treated it in the vein of comedy. He lost nothing of the humanity of his characters, nothing of the interest of their story. He tore a leaf out of the Book of the Age. He exhibited at once his surpassing skill as a maker of plays and the fruits of his labour as a student of human character.

CHAPTER TEN

A LITTLE OF ALL SORTS

"Pinero's great merit was that he kept the theatre open."—P. P. Howe.

"Irene Vanbrugh is in a sense my pupil," Sir Arthur says proudly. Miss Vanbrugh with no less pride acknowledges him to have been her master.

She began her tuition when he asked her to play the young actress of the early eighteen-sixties in *Trelawny of the Wells*. She had acted prettily and with a sense of humour in several comedies and, being a recruit to the stage at that time still unusual, she had attracted more interest perhaps than could be accounted for by her actual performances. So at all events some people thought, and made the same disparaging remark about her elder sister, Miss Violet Vanbrugh.

They were the daughters of a West-country clergyman, Prebendary Barnes, who had put no obstacle in the way of their taking to the stage. Indeed, they were sent to a famous training-ground for young actors and actresses, Miss Sarah Thorne's theatre at Margate. There was at that time no Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (which, by the way, a son of the Prebendary, Mr. Kenneth Barnes, has directed since its foundation). Proficiency in acting had to be picked up in a less systematic fashion. The sisters

MISS MARIE LÖHR

as Josepha in *Preserving Mr. Panmure*, a charming portrait of one of the prettiest girls that have adorned the English stage.

were well trained in this Margate theatre where the bill was constantly changed; they were offered good parts when they began their careers in London, where they both proved in their different ways that they were actresses of real ability to whom chances fell to them because they merited them, not for any other reason at all. The younger of the two had until this time revealed no very special talent for comedy. *Trelawny* gave her the opportunity to do this.

Trelawny was a charming little play. Pinero himself described it as a "comedietta," which proved that he did not rate it very high. Yet it is more alive to-day than most of his more solid works. It does not "date," since it was a costume piece when it was written. The emotions in it are of a gentle, uncontroversial kind.

Even Bernard Shaw was touched by this "tune of 1860." The piece which came before it (and after *The Benefit of the Doubt*) he had ridiculed without pity. That piece was *The Princess and the Butterfly*, produced at the St. James's by George Alexander in March 1897. This is what Shaw wrote about it:

"Mr. Pinero has launched at us a play in five acts all about being over forty. The heroine is forty and can talk about nothing else. The hero is over forty and is blind to every other fact in the universe. Having this topic of conversation in common, they get engaged in order that they may save one another from being seduced by the attraction of youth into foolish marriages. They then fall in love, she with a fiery youth of twenty-eight, he with a meteoric girl of eighteen.

"Up to the last moment I confess I had sufficient confidence in Mr. Pinero's saving sense of humour to believe that he would give the verdict against himself and admit that the meteoric girl was too young for the hero (twenty-seven years discrepancy) and the heroine too old for the fiery youth (thirteen years discrepancy).

"But no, he gravely decided that the heart that loves never ages; and now perhaps he will write us another drama, limited strictly to three acts, with, as heroine, the meteoric girl at forty with her husband at sixty-seven, and, as hero, the fiery youth at forty-nine with his wife at sixty-two."

That was not undeserved ridicule, yet the play "kept the theatre open." Its social satire was amusing. All the threads of the plot were strung deftly together. It was an odd mixture of sentimental comedy and comedy of character. It defied tradition—or rather it went back to an elderly tradition—for it was in five acts. It outraged the current canons of form and symmetry. Its originality even hurled itself against the barriers of common sense. Yet it was successful as an entertainment. One performance in it was so good as to be talked about among all who cared for the theatre—the performance of Miss Fay Davis as a young Italian girl, exquisite in beauty, all loveliness and laughter. Her broken English, her kittenish frolics and vexations, helped enormously the success of the piece.

Its subject was, as Shaw said, the malady of middle age. Both the Princess Pannonia and Sir George Lamorant have reached this period of life. Both feel

that they have tasted the best that existence has to offer and that the future lies before them joyless and unexciting. This is chiefly because they have never had anything to do but amuse themselves, because they have never really come to grips with life, have never suffered, have never loved. They almost make up their minds to end their long platonic affection, their perfunctory flirtation of so many years, by a marriage which shall enable them to drift quietly into old age holding each other's hands, not with the close grip of passion, but with the gentle clasp of a moderate tenderness, based partly on convenience and partly upon mutual esteem.

SIR GEORGE

Well, suppose you and I become husband and wife? I am sufficiently your senior. You are rich. I am far from the state of a beggar. The world could not throw up its hands in surprise. Would it not be in all ways a suitable match? We both suffer—morbidly, fantastically it may be—but we suffer. Should we not find in each other a cure? You dread being tempted to marry unwisely. No such temptation, I believe, is likely to befall me. But, at any rate, your honouring me as I propose would make both—safe.

PRINCESS

Safe——

SIR GEORGE

What do you say?

PRINCESS. [*Her eyes closed*]

We should not—naturally—love each other.

SIR GEORGE

At our age I suppose there is no love but in folly. [*She makes a movement.*] Forgive me. The expression, "our time of life," was your own. [*She assents by a nod.*] I speak of course

of passionate love. Otherwise, am I quite outside the reach of your tender regard? As for passion, let us make ourselves believe that we could not be five-and-twenty if we could! Passion! My dear Laura, has it ever happened to you to stroll through a garden on the morning following a great letting off of fireworks? Oh! the hollow, blackened shells of the spent cartridges trodden into the turf. We should at least be spared the contemplation of *that*. But you and I are already fast linked by many associations, and sympathy is affection. Certainly, in that spirit, *I* love *you* most sincerely.

PRINCESS. [*In a strange voice*]
Say three times you love me.

SIR GEORGE. [*Puzzled*]
Three times——?

PRINCESS
"I love you," thrice.

SIR GEORGE. [*As if repeating a lesson*]
I love you. I love you. I love you.
[*She throws her head back and breaks into a peal of hysterical laughter.*

What reason has the Princess for this strange request? Simply that a few minutes earlier she has heard such a triple declaration of love from the fervent lips of a young man really in love with her. She has won the heart of the preternaturally grave Edward Oriel, and his habitual reserve has broken down before the flood-tide of his emotion. Fear of ridicule hinders her admission that she loves Oriel, and she strives to persuade herself that she must accept Sir George's lukewarm proposal. But before the passing of the month for which she has bargained with each of her suitors, Sir George's heart is also engaged in earnest.

He has taken under his protection, almost adopted, an Italian girl whom he believes to be his brother's child. She is a wayward, charming creature, with a very tender heart hidden beneath her gaiety and mischief. When he discovers first that she is not his brother's child, and next that she has learnt to love him, he very quickly passes from affection to adoration. He and the Princess make an effort to clinch their half-concluded bargain, but it fails; they each take up their newly found happiness to the tune of a Hungarian march called "A Szerelim mindig ifju marad," which, according to Mr. Pinero, means "Love is ever young."

Unquestionably the last two acts of *The Princess and the Butterfly* are fashioned with a skill compelling admiration and touched with a certain charm that prevents us from analysing too closely the kind of happiness which the Princess and the Butterfly have found. At the moment we accept our author's conclusion. The strains of the march ring in our ears, the glamour of romantic attachment dazzles our eyes. Yes, we cry, love *is* ever young; it can bring a fresh interest and a vivifying tempest of emotion even into the loves of the jaded victims of Society, men and women who have done nothing in the world but

> eddy about
> Here and there—eat and drink,
> Chatter,

without even the stimulus of love or hate, without striving, though it be but blindly, towards any aim.

But when you think it over quietly, as one should think over any play that pretends to offer us sincere criticism upon life, you have an uncomfortable suspicion not only that the world would write the Princess Pannonia and Sir George Lamorant down as foolish people, but that the world would probably be right.

For on what basis have they founded their determination to defy the opinion of the world? So far as we can judge, "upon the fugitive attraction of sex." Now, marriages of men and women of tolerably equal age and of tolerably common tastes may be based upon this attraction with every hope of success. It is, after all, the natural basis. Even when its first fine, careless rapture has waned, the leaping flames of the fresh-lit bonfire are succeeded by a steady glow which gives out more warmth and comfort. But a marked disparity of age and a striking dissimilarity of taste and inclination are seldom—very seldom—blended into harmony at the bidding of passion; they are stubborn bars of iron which cannot be permanently fused by the mere white-heat of a sudden infatuation.

If Mr. Pinero had shown us that there was more than infatuation in the loves of his strangely assorted lovers, his conclusion would possibly bear the test of reflection. If he had put the whole story of their loves upon a higher plane, and hinted to us that it is never too late to hope that we may come upon the key to life's puzzle, he would have given us a poetic and a satisfying thought to take away with us.

Only—but this is rare—
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear;
When our world-deafened ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd—
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.
And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth for ever chase
That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
An air of coolness plays upon his face,
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
And then he thinks he knows
The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes.

No one expects Mr. Pinero to be a Matthew Arnold, but there in those beautiful lines of Matthew Arnold is a subject that a playwright of poetic feeling might well essay. A true and tender devotion must always help to make the path of life plainer, to clear up the mists that gather round the wayfarer, to show that there is a definite plan of existence which perhaps he has before never suspected. We may analyse this devotion as we will. We may take the calm, considered view of Gibbon, who understood by the passion of love " the union of desire, friendship and tenderness which is inflamed by a single female, which prefers her to the rest of her sex, and which seeks her pos-

session as the supreme or the sole happiness of our being." Or we may incline to a more mystical, transcendental view. But, however we regard it, we can only reason deductively from its manifestations, and here is the dramatist's opportunity.

Mr. Pinero had such an opportunity in *The Princess and the Butterfly*; he hardly made the most of it. It scarcely seems to have possessed much interest for him. If it had, he would surely have given us more of an insight into the characters of the Princess and Sir George, and also of Edward Oriel and Fay Zuliani. But he only elaborates those characters just enough for the purposes of the play.

This is his usual way. Now and then he does appear to have been genuinely interested in problems of character. In other plays he gives his creations only just enough individuality to be effective on the stage, to serve the ends of his dramatic scheme. They are so cleverly presented that they leave the impression of real characters, but they are, as a rule, not more than half characters. The author does not turn the light of his revealing lantern all round them, upon every side of their personality in turn, but only upon the one or two sides that will be useful to him. In other words, Mr. Pinero does not pursue character for the sake of character, but for the sake of making stage-plays. He does not take a handful of people and let them work out their own destinies. He is not so much the observer, the recorder, as the puller of strings. He plays with his characters as you play with chess men, moving them here and there, wher-

ever he sees the opportunity for an effective combination. The combinations he makes are immensely effective, but they cannot in the nature of things produce upon the spectator who looks closely into them the effect of an unconstrained sincerity.

In *Trelawny of the Wells* the characters were elaborated just sufficiently to make them amusing and to explain the plot. No need for unconstrained sincerity here, no place for philosophy. It belongs to the same order as *Sweet Lavender*; the difference in the technique of the two plays shows us how diligently Pinero kept up with the advance in methods of playwriting.

Shaw found that *Trelawny's* appeal to him lay in

"a certain delicacy which makes me loth to lay my fingers on it. The life that it reproduces had been already portrayed in the real sixties by Dickens in his sketch of the Crummles company and by Anthony Trollope in his Chronicles of Barsetshire. I cannot pretend to think that Mr. Pinero, in reverting to that period, has really had to turn back the clock as far as his own sympathies and ideals are concerned. It seems to me that the world is to him still the world of Johnny Eames and Lily Dale, Vincent Crummles and Newman Noggs: his Paula Tanquerays and Mrs. Ebbsmiths appearing as pure aberrations whose external differences he is able to observe as far as they can be observed without the inner clue, but whose point of view he has never found."

Part of the interest of *Trelawny* the play owed to the introduction of a character representing Tom

Robertson, the author of *Caste*. Part was due to the broad humours of the theatrical folk and the satirical portraits of the highly respectable persons into whose family the star of Bagnigge Wells was entering as a bride. The costumes had something to do with its success, the neat skill of the workmanship a great deal. Also it was acted with humour by a company which included Gerald du Maurier: his sketch of a gloomy tragedian of the " old school " was one of his first hits as a character actor.

So pleased was Pinero with the progress of his pupil, Irene Vanbrugh, that he determined to give her something more difficult to play, something that would test her talents severely. With her in mind he completed the part of Sophy Fullgarney the manicurist in *The Gay Lord Quex*. It was never Pinero's practice to write what the Americans aptly term " vehicles " for a prominent actor or actress. Yet when he drew his characters he often had certain players in mind. So it was now. Thoughts of John Hare and Miss Vanbrugh helped to shape his drawing of Sophy and the Marquis of Quex. Once more, as with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, he gained an overwhelming success largely through an actress revealing qualities which had until then scarcely been suspected, certainly not displayed. That revelation put Miss Irene Vanbrugh, as the earlier one had put Mrs. Patrick Campbell, into the front rank of English actresses.

In each case a great deal depended on the way the chief woman's part was played, in each Pinero's tire-

less coaching and instruction deserved a very large share of the credit for the success won. Here again John Hare was provided with a part in which not his finest qualities, but the superb skill he had shown in playing disreputable though rather distinguished peers, was given most effective scope. There was a likeness between the Duke of St. Olpherts and the Marquis of Quex, both were by way of being related to Lord Dangars in *The Profligate*. But there were subtle differences between the three and in any case even if Hare had had the same part three times over his humour would have made it diverting and attractive over and over again.

It was, indeed, more due to scenes that gave opportunity for acting which excited and thrilled than to its intrinsic interest that *The Gay Lord Quex* had so complete a success. Up to 1899 Pinero had written four plays of serious intent, all dealing with the relations between men and women. Two of them showed how impossible it is for a man or a woman to get rid of the burden of an evil past. The other two pointed out the obstacles that lie in the way of mere friendship between the sexes. So far Mr. Pinero seemed to have based his serious work upon a settled view of life and human nature—a sound view, a broad view, a view that experience and intuition alike supported. But in 1899 came *The Gay Lord Quex*. The theory of Mr. Pinero's "settled view" seemed to be overturned. Most people could see no sign in this brilliantly clever play of anything but an anxiety to make the most of exceptionally interesting dramatic

material. If *The Gay Lord Quex* expressed any view at all, it appeared to be a view directly opposite to that which its author expounded in *The Profligate*. Here was Quex—"the wickedest man in London," according to Sophy Fullgarney, who knows most things—able to shake off his burden of loose living and settle down, apparently a model husband, with "the typical creamy English girl," Muriel Eden. He has "reformed," it is true, but so had Dunstan Renshaw. He is genuinely in love, but Renshaw's passion was no less genuine. All the force that there was in Mr. Pinero's handling of *The Profligate* theme seemed to be dissipated by the manner in which he treated the same subject in *The Gay Lord Quex*.

But was this the final word on the subject? How if the object of the latter play was to show what a low tone of morals and manners prevailed in society at the close of the nineteenth century? How if the whole piece was conceived in a mood of bitter irony? "If it were so," you may reply, "there would surely be one character to act the part of the ancient chorus; to indicate, not necessarily by words, but by general attitude of mind, that the author's purpose was satire; to represent a higher type than the Quexes and the Fraynes and the Bastlings and the Mrs. Jack Edens of this world. For dramatic purposes we must have contrast, and that is just what we miss in *The Gay Lord Quex*."

There is weight in these arguments, I admit, but I am inclined to believe—I want to believe—that they can be answered. Look at the plays of the

eighteenth-century dramatists. They are valuable beyond compare as evidence of the prevailing tone of the age in which they were written. Is it not at least possible that Mr. Pinero set himself the task of drawing a picture of decadent Society as it appeared to him, and leaving the spectators each to draw the moral for himself? It is true *The Gay Lord Quex* gives us the unpleasant sensation of having passed an evening with a collection of people whom we dislike and despise. But is not that just the impression which Mr. Pinero intended it to produce? He takes a theatre-full of people, five-sixths of whom are dominated by an absurd reverence for rank and fashion, and he shows them how exceedingly unpleasant people of rank and fashion can be; he shows that (to amplify a verdict said to have been passed by one ornament of Victorian Society upon another) they have the manners of organ-grinders and the morals of monkeys.

Naturally, then, in such a play as this we miss any appeal to the heart. It makes its appeal entirely to the head. There is no one with whom we really sympathize, except, perhaps, the dear old lady whose hospitality and confidence are so shamefully abused. Muriel Eden is a featureless Society doll, with just enough cunning to carry on an intrigue, even after she is engaged to Quex, with a young man of whom she knows nothing. As for Captain Bastling, the young man in question, we know that he is stupid, and we are told that he is immoral—a very unattractive combination.

Pinero, by the way, has a poor opinion of young men. Renshaw, Ardale, Bastling, Denstroude, all are of the same vicious type, and naturally enough they develop into the Quexes and the Fraynes and the Peter Jarmans and the St. Olphertses of middle and later life. As for Sophy Fullgarney, she is a wonderfully interesting study, but Quex is right when he calls her, in his elegant way, "a low spy, an impudent, bare-faced liar, a common kitchen-cat who wriggles into the best rooms, gets herself fondled, and then spits." Quex is interesting, too, but he is three parts cad, as well as a hunter after sordid, commonplace adventures, lacking the excuse even of romance or passion.

Consider the course of the plot for a moment. Sophy, the New Bond Street manicurist, is Muriel Eden's foster-sister. She is capable, common to a degree in manner and mind, warm-hearted, excitable. She is the daughter of a bailiff on the Eden estates, but her character is that of a typical London *gamine*. The Edens have set her up in Bond Street (which showed ignorance on their part of the usual nature of the manicuring industry at that date). The two girls have kept up their childish affection. When the Marquess of Quex, with a reputation that is only faintly adumbrated by the epithet gay, has offered himself, at the age of forty-eight, and been accepted by Muriel under pressure of her family, Sophy is sorely troubled at the thought of "her darling" being sacrificed to an old rake. She determines to catch Quex tripping if she can, for Muriel, who has

listened to squalid records of her future husband's "gaieties," avows that "if she found him up to anything of the sort now," she would break off her engagement and marry Bastling. But Quex is not to be caught by the pretty manicurist's sly blandishments. "A kiss or a squeeze of the waist—anything of that sort" would do, but Sophy looks and sighs and pouts all in vain. This method failing, she will spy upon him and find out whether any other succeeds where she has failed. Soon she does find something out. The Duchess of Strood, a foolish, extravagantly sentimental creature of thirty-seven, has been one of Lord Quex's *chères amies*; much to his annoyance, she demands a farewell scene.

She is staying with Quex's aunt at Richmond, and for some unaccountable reason he consents to "a parting in keeping with their great attachment" in the boudoir adjoining her bedroom late at night. By chance Sophy, who has been allowed to spend an afternoon in the grounds, overhears enough to guess that something of the kind is intended, and her suspicions are strengthened when the Duchess announces that she had has to send her maid home. She rises to the occasion and offers to take the absent maid's place. Then, of course, all happens in due course. Quex goes to the Duchess's apartments merely to return her presents, and presently Sophy is discovered at the keyhole.

The scene which follows between Quex and the girl who is determined to ruin his chance with Miss Eden is the most ingenious Pinero has ever

written. The Duchess has been sent away by Quex to share a friend's room on pretence of "nerves." He remains—to try and save her reputation, even if he cannot mend his own. His offers of money are scornfully rejected. Sophy will tell all she knows (which is not much, for Quex has been ice to his old flame's blandishments) and disclose the damning fact of his midnight visit. Quex's next move is more effective than the attempt to buy silence. He has locked the doors of the rooms, and he declares that if Sophy denounces him she shall denounce herself too. She may rouse the house, but the Duchess is safe; Sophy and Quex will be found alone. Her story will not be believed. Her character will be gone.

Neither her rage nor her appeals have any effect. At last, in her dread of such an exposure (which would also mean the ending of her own engagement to a Bond Street palmist) the girl consents to hold her tongue. She is made to write a letter which puts her in Quex's power if ever he should produce it, and she turns to go. But suddenly the thought of Muriel comes into her head. "Why, it's like selling Muriel!" she cries. "Just to get myself out of this I'm simply handing her over to you! I won't do it! I won't!" And she pulls violently at the bell.

Her sudden, self-sacrificing change of front has a remarkable effect on the man. Mumbling words of admiration, he thrusts the letter into her hand, unlocks the door leading to her bedroom, and flings it open. But first the awakened servants at the other door must be dismissed with some explanation of the

loud ringing. A message about the Duchess's letters in the morning is invented by Quex, and when Sophy, all unnerved and almost hysterical, has repeated it and totters across the room, he speaks in an altered tone. "Be off," he says kindly, "go to bed. Serve me how you please. Miss Fullgarney, upon my soul I—I humbly beg your pardon." And the curtain falls on Sophy's "God bless you. You're a gentleman! I'll do what I can for you!"

No one, however much they disliked the piece as a whole, could deny the great power and grip of this remarkable scene. Given the characters of Quex and Sophy, it is thoroughly natural, full of observation, and of absorbing interest. No one who saw it on the night of the first performance, when the house was in the dark as to how the scene would end, is likely to forget the intensity with which it was followed, or the outburst of applause, of pent-up excitement and admiration, at the close of the act. Nothing more ingenious in this kind, nothing cleverer, has been written by an English playwright since Sheridan wrote the screen scene in *The School for Scandal*.

After the third act nothing remains but to get Bastling out of the way, and this is accomplished by Sophy without any difficulty at all. She has somehow or other overlooked this delightful young man's real character. Quex tells her, however, that "he's just what I was at eight-and-twenty—what I was—and worse," and Sophy now determines to apply to him the same test by which Quex's fidelity to Muriel was proved. Bastling falls into the trap at once.

Her suggestion that she would appreciate "a little more than plain thanks" for her help to him and to Muriel, leads to a kiss. Muriel is a witness, and Bastling hurries out like a whipped dog. So far as the audience has had its sympathies aroused at all, they are now with Quex, and the curtain falls upon the prospect of Muriel's early marriage to him.

No romance here, and, according to my view, no suggestion of romance intended. Just a picture of the way in which marriage was regarded and everyday life in London lived at the end of the nineteenth century. Not a pleasant picture, not a picture that makes us feel more reconciled to the ugliness of life, but one that may brace us up, nevertheless, by bringing us face to face with facts, and filling us with a healthy disgust of the kind of world in which the Quexes and the Sophy Fullgarneys live and move and have their restless, worthless being. If a poet (and dramatists are poets, even though they never write verse) can make us face life with renewed confidence and vitality, and can tune our minds to

> Oh! world as God has made it,
> All is beauty,

he is beyond question a benefactor to his age. But as our bodies sometimes need unpleasant medicine—medicine which perhaps makes us worse before we are better—so do our minds now and then require an astringent tonic, some plain presentment of unpleasant facts that pulls us up short and sets us thinking of the goal whither we tend. Such a tonic

Photo by Window & Grove]

MISS IRENE VANBRUGH

whose attractive performance as the manicurist in *The Gay Lord Quex* (she carries her manicure bag in her hand) was an event in stage history.

was *The Gay Lord Quex*, though most people regarded it merely in the light of an exciting entertainment, akin to lion-taming or walking the slack wire, a performance that stirred their sluggish interest and helped them to get through an evening without being bored.

More than two years passed without another play from Pinero. Then came *Iris* produced in September 1901. Here for the first time the dramatist divided his acts into scenes, lowering the curtain several times for a few moments to show the lapse of a few hours. And here for almost the only time in his history his work failed of its effect because the chief character was unsuitably played. It was found difficult to cast both the principal parts. Arthur Bouchier and Edmund Maurice were both tried for the passionate, half-English financier, Ferdinand Maldonado. Oscar Asche was then asked to rehearse. At first all seemed to go well. At the second rehearsal Pinero pulled the actor up every few moments, his usual method. Asche did not like this and offered to give the part up. But Pinero liked his way of playing it and was "most kind." He played it with a vigour and imagination which he seldom showed before or afterwards.

In New York the casting was not happy either. An American "star" proved unequal to the part of Iris and tried to make the play more attractive by cutting a good deal of it out. She called a rehearsal for "cuts." Asche, who was repeating his performance of Maldonado, did not attend. He said he knew

Pinero would not allow a line to be altered. When he got to the theatre in the evening he was told that his part had been heavily reduced. He said "I shall play it as usual," and did. Whenever the "star" jumped ahead so as to leave out a speech by him he politely took her back, introducing what had been omitted by some such lines as these:

"You did not allow me to say. . . ."

"I was about to tell you. . . ."

Or "You interrupted me when I was remarking. . . ."

This only went on during one act. The "cuts" were abandoned after that.

Iris was a difficult part to play. In drama it is easy to be attractive as one who has to struggle, even though the struggle end in failure. To drift, to fail weakly, that is in itself depressing. To make a drifter hold an audience demands a gift of temperament which the Iris of 1901 did not possess. Miss Fay Davis had been perfect as Fay Zuliani in *The Princess and the Butterfly*. Small wonder the author wished for her help again. But this time he laid on her young shoulders a burden too heavy for them. Not all his coaching, all his entreaty, could succeed in endowing her Iris with either grip or credibility. She was unable to realize the character. Her girlish moods and graces, so delightful in the earlier play, were in this one irritating. They stood between the spectators and the figure whom the dramatist had meant them to see. Actors, and actresses too as a rule, can only be happy in parts which present them

in a favourable light, which win the spectators' sympathy. Miss Fay Davis played for sympathy and thus played against the author's intention. Acted with a strong sense of character, the wretchedly indeterminate woman, without standards of conduct, without self-respect, without any motive stronger than the desire to be comfortable, might have been an interesting, even a tragic figure.

Here was the case of Iris Bellamy. Like many another young and pretty widow, she was left with a fortune that would be forfeited if she married again. Did she want to marry again? She thought so, but she was not sure. Many suitors hung about her. Only two had any chance. One was a young fellow who was obliged to contemplate going to Canada to earn a living, a "nice boy," nothing more, whom she would find agreeable as a lover. The other was a millionaire, "one of the great Maldonado family, great, no not great—big financiers," one of the three leading groups in Europe. Grandson of "a Jew tradesman in Madrid who broke and went to South America, made a fortune in tobacco at Havana, and afterwards married an Englishwoman." Was educated in England, but is not yet (he admits it) "wholly English in his ways." Iris likes him as a friend, a rich friend, and when she finds she is in danger of marrying Laurence Trenwith and losing her money, she decides to use "Maldo" as a lifebelt. He is fiercely in love with her. Her acceptance of him as her husband fills his heart with joy. When she tells him that she does not,

cannot love him, but "will try to do her duty faithfully as mistress of his house," his delight turns to fury. She has tricked him. She has overset his momentary belief that "it was reserved for him to escape the proverbial fate of the millionaire where the love of woman is concerned."

However, he will agree to her conditions and he leaves her with that understanding between them—leaves her to receive Trenwith for a secret dead-of-night farewell visit. She can see him safely, she fancies, because she has engaged herself to Maldonado, but when Trenwith hears of this, he guesses at the truth and cries: "You are marrying him to save yourself from me." Looking into his eyes, with his hot kiss on her lips, she reverses her prudent decision. She will not promise to go to Canada—"Your wife—a farmer's wife—mistress of a log-hut—to work with my hands! I dare not! I am not fit to be a poor man's wife."

But she will not marry the millionaire either. She casts away her anchor, breaks her word to Maldonado, accepts Trenwith as a lover. She will not have a poor man for a husband, but she has no objection to making this young man play an unpleasantly equivocal part, no reluctance to become his mistress. The boy, however, has a sense of what befits a man. He cannot earn a living at home. His only chance is to farm in Canada. Iris is incapable of understanding why he declines to live upon her money, equally unable to see why he will not agree to accept "some suitable occupation in town," a

secretaryship, for instance, that imaginary refuge of the incapable and the unlucky—" the sort of billet," as Laurence says, " that provides a man with gloves and cab fares, and a flower for his coat."

She has no conception of the feelings that spur a man on to be independent and to make a place for himself in the world. She has always taken, as they came, the good things with which from childhood Fortune has furnished her, has always been profuse to her, with money earned by other people. Why should Laurence insist upon talking about " that terrible ranch " at Chilcoten? What does his career matter? Why cannot he snuggle down comfortably, as she has done, and make an ignoble ease his only aim in life? " Another time " is her cry when he speaks of the possibility of her joining him on the ranch and becoming his wife. " Let us discuss the point another time."

Before " another time " arrives, the news comes that Iris has lost her fortune. Her solicitor and trustee has fled, leaving ruin behind him (a timely hit this, in 1901). All that is left to her is a beggarly £150 a year. Surely she need not any longer stand out against Laurence's pleading. There is no reason whatever why she should. He offers her independence, and a home, not luxurious, but as comfortable as she can make in England on her £150 a year; and if she loves him, as she protests—but is it a case of the lady protesting too much? She does, it is true, announce her engagement to Trenwith immediately, but she will not go to Canada with him.

He can make a home and come back for her in a few years' time. Evidently she counts unconsciously upon something better turning up in the meantime —thinks, perhaps, that her £150 will go some way towards comfort in cheap *pensions* (she knows little enough about them!)—shrinks, at any rate, from the idea of the ranch. But of course she does not put it in this way, even to herself. She persuades herself that she is acting nobly. She tells Laurence that he would despise her if he recollected that she declined to marry him when she was well-off—

"that it wasn't until I was poor—almost as poor as yourself—that I would marry you; and that then I promptly hung myself round your neck like a stone."

And to Laurence, reminding her that, whenever she joins him, she will still be a poor woman, she talks in this exalted strain. She will go to him

"after I have had my own struggle, my own battle with poverty, singly, alone; after I have proved to you that I can live patiently, uncomplainingly, without luxury, willingly relinquishing costly pleasures, content with the barest comfort—yes, yes, after I have shown you that there are other and better and deeper qualities in my nature than you have suspected, than I myself have suspected—then, then, I'll join you, Laurie."

She deceives herself, she deceives her lover, she deceives her friends. And when a woman of this character begins to suffer from the delusion that there are hidden depths of gold in the trashy ore of her nature, she becomes more dangerous than

ever. This is the mood in which she works the most complete destruction.

One friend, however, is not deceived. Maldonado knows pretty well the nature of the woman in whose pursuit the sting of passion keeps him steadfast. He plays the part of the magnanimous friend, takes Laurence under his especial care, sees him off with false good-nature and a devilish chuckle, then goes back to bid Iris farewell, and to leave with her a cheque-book that she can use at will. She protests that she will never use it, is angered when he insists upon leaving it for her to destroy. Yet almost at once a sudden need for money to satisfy a generous impulse sends her to it—thoughtlessly perhaps. And, when she realizes that she has used one of "Maldo's" cheques, she does not tear it up. Nor, when the servant comes to take her dressing-bag, does she forget to drop the cheque-book into it.

And then, of course, "almost from the very moment of my receiving it, my hand accustomed itself to scrawling cheques for one object and another" until the account considerately opened by Maldonado is overdrawn. This naturally enough brings Maldo to her side, "pocket-book in hand." But the repulsion he excites is still strong enough to stimulate her to flight. Then follows a period of poverty. Why does not Iris write to Trenwith to say that she is in dire need? It is hard to say. The author offers us no help. Perhaps she still calculated on "something turning up." No doubt the idea of the ranch was still distasteful. She thought at first she could

live upon her friends. But they turned their backs upon her, all but Maldonado. He furnished a flat close to his house in Mount Street. He kept it ready for occupation at any moment. He was always on the look-out for the tenant he meant to have. And one evening, when Iris was at her last shilling almost, he met her and gave her the key, and—she used it.

Thus the fourth act of the play shows Iris in this flat with Maldonado still her lover, more her lover than ever, it seems, for he is urging her to marry him and to accept a settled position. He admits that he has " treated her a bit roughly," and frankly owns that he meant to have his revenge, if he could get it, " for her caprice in throwing him over for a lover." Now he is anxious " to make it up to her." But Iris still dreams of the time for Trenwith's return. It does not occur to her that the altered state of her life will alter Laurie's love for her or interfere with their plans. By this time he must have made a fairly comfortable home. She will be delighted to leave Maldonado and to go away with the man she loves. So she puts Maldo off, asks for time, promises to think it over.

A few minutes later comes the one old friend who has been faithful with the news that Trenwith is back in England. Her instant thought is that the old friend shall act as a go-between. Her undeveloped moral sense sees no reason why he should dislike the office. His protest she meets with an air of pained surprise. In the end, however, he undertakes to let Trenwith know where she is. The same evening

Trenwith appears, and Iris stammers out her story. She is plainly incapable of perceiving anything in it except that she has had an unpleasant time and deserves sympathy. When Laurence has heard her to the end and, murmuring incoherent words, takes up his hat and coat, she finds it hard to believe that he intends to leave her. Even then she cannot see things as they are.

It is "the little good in her that has proved her downfall." It was her love for Laurence that prompted her first downward step. So she makes her excuses. But they are powerless to stay Trenwith's steps. He stumbles out, dazed with the shame and distress of her story, and then comes Maldonado, wild with rage, having discovered his mistress's deceit and heard all from the neighbouring room. His first impulse is to kill her, but he subdues it and turns her out into the night. And, when she has gone, his wild anger returns, and the curtain falls upon him as he breaks everything within his reach.

"Not an edifying story," was the general verdict, but no doubt a lifelike picture. It lacked some of its likeness to life on the stage, because Iris was played by an actress unsuited to the part. At least this is the impression that a reading of the play leaves on the mind. It is essentially a study of one woman, and it demands a really great actress to interpret it—an actress who can express experience and intuition in terms of emotion. Mr. Pinero concentrated all his effort upon the portrayal of Iris, and his effort lost half its effect. The minor characters have less to do

in this than in any other of the dramas we have been considering. The actual writing is simpler. The play contains few of those biting phrases that stick in the memory and show us the value to a playwright of a pretty wit aided by a full notebook. . . . It is not even constructed with Mr. Pinero's usual deftness. There is one piece of extremely clever stagecraft—the scene in which Maldonado finds the fragments of a letter that tells him of Trenwith's intended visit to Iris. By making him put the fragments together, and silently extract the latch-key from an ornament where he has placed it just before, the author conveys to the audience, without a word spoken, the nature of the development they are to expect. The scene which shows the reception of the news that Mr. Archie Keen, the well-known solicitor, has decamped, is very naturally conceived and written too. But, taken as a whole, the piece cannot be considered to represent worthily Mr. Pinero's standard of craftsmanship.

The division of acts into scenes; the long interval which the spectator's imagination has to bridge over between the end of the third act, when Iris begins her life of hardship, tempered by Maldo's chequebook, and the opening of the fourth, which shows her in Maldo's flat; the sketchy treatment of side issues—all are signs that the author's interest was in the play of character alone. And it was a masterly study of character that he gave us, even though *Iris* be not a masterly play. It is, it seems to me, the one play which he has written rather in order to follow out his own interest in his subject than to make an effec-

tive stage-piece. In each of the others he sacrificed something in order to be dramatic. In *Iris* it was drama that went by the board.

It seemed plain that Pinero had a serious purpose in mind when he wrote *Iris*. He had written about the same time a preface to a book on the *Idea of Tragedy* hoping that "we poor modern playwrights will not be found wanting at least in the endeavour to respond to lofty and heroic inspiration." Was this such an endeavour? It certainly appeared to be. But what exactly was he driving at? As soon as you enquired what Pinero's purpose was agreement vanished: a hundred voices offered a hundred varying explanations. One apologist invited us to consider Mrs. Bellamy the victim of circumstances. The fate of Iris, he cried, might be the fate of any moderately good woman against whom chance and Frederick Maldonado incessantly warred. That acute student, Mr. W. L. Courtney, told us that Iris is merely weak, not wicked, and that Mr. Pinero meant to show how wrong it is to let oneself drift, or to be too fond of soft cushions and the sunny side of the Street of Human Life. A third suggestion was that Iris is a thoroughly bad woman. A fourth, that she was at heart a thoroughly good woman, sorely sinned against. And so on to the hundredth, possibly beyond.

After studying the play with care, both in the theatre and from the printed page, I think there can be no doubt that Iris is a worthless woman, weak, self-indulgent, and incapable of appreciating what is right and what wrong; not an immoral woman, but

a non-moral, one who lacks both the will-power and the intelligence to grasp even the outlines of morality. She seems to be in this respect intended as a contrast to Mrs. Tanqueray, and, even more so, to Agnes Ebbsmith. Both Paula and Agnes knew well enough when they were so acting as to be true to themselves, to the better instincts of their natures. When they were false to those instincts they were deliberately false. They allowed their passions or their worse instincts to carry them away with a full knowledge that they must in some way pay the price for self-indulgence.

Of such natures is the stuff of drama compounded. In a play you want a conflict between the force of will and some opposing force, it may chance of nature, or of some other will. Your characters must know their own minds. They must aim at something, whether a good end or a bad. In the larger drama of existence, also, the men and women who play the prominent parts are those who of set purpose shape means to ends. Of the nerveless, the undetermined, nothing is to be hoped. The world has no use for them. If a man or a woman is wicked energetically, and deliberately chooses to be wicked, there is a chance that some day they may alter their line of conduct and may benefit Society instead of harming it.

> They say best men are moulded out of faults,
> And oftentimes become much more the better
> For being a little bad.

Much better have them in your community than

people who are merely good from unthinking habit, and who, if it became fashionable to lie and steal, would eschew truth and honesty as readily as they now profess these virtues. The bitterest fate of all in Dante's *Inferno* was reserved for the souls of those

Che visser senza infamia e senza lodo,

who in their lives earned neither praise nor blame. Heaven cast them forth lest they should stain its fair courts; Hell would have none of them, for even in Hell the wicked would have taken place above them.

Questi non hanno speranza di morte,
E la lor cieca vita e tanto bassa
Che invidiosi son d'ogni altra sorte.[1]

Among these wretched spirits Dante would, I fancy, have placed the soul of Iris Bellamy. She answers to the letter his description of the feeble folk resembling "that caitiff choir of angels who are neither rebels nor God's faithful servants, but thought of their own selfish interests alone."

The play was not a tragedy because there was no struggle; Iris accepted her fate tamely. But there was in it a tragic idea. Of all Pinero's plays this has been the most warmly received in Germany and Scandinavia.

There may have been ground for the suggestion that Pinero drew from the performances of Eleanora Duse, which had been delighting London at this period, some of the inspiration under which he wrote *Iris*.

[1] "These have no hope of death, and their blind life so meanly drags that they are envious of every other fate."

Perhaps the idea grew out of the wearing by Miss Davis in the last act of her hair brushed back from her forehead with a grey lock in the middle, very much as La Duse wore hers. Certainly Duse would have made Iris live, as she lives in the printed play for all persons of imagination and experience. If the play "dates" for us, that is because, as in all the works of this period, the suave smooth-flowing current of social life is something which a later generation has not experienced. The core of it is a story and a warning which can never be out of date.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ACME OF TECHNIQUE

" C'est un métier de faire une pièce dramatique, comme de faire une pendule; il faut plus que de l'esprit pour être dramaturge."

(Play-writing must be learned, like clock-making; a dramatic author needs more than wit.)—La Bruyère.

" Sir Arthur Pinero is a thoroughly competent craftsman and thoroughly competent craftsmanship has become for the moment unfashionable."—Clayton Hamilton *in* " *Conversations on Contemporary Drama.*"

The year 1893, as we have seen, marked the apex of Pinero's career as a dramatist of ideas. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* fixed his reputation securely as that of the leading English playwright of his age. In 1906 he touched the peak of his excellence as a brilliantly skilful contriver of stage anecdotes, as the foremost dramatic craftsman to be found in any country at that time.

George Alexander produced in 1906 *His House in Order*. In technical adroitness, in easy handling of plot, in the natural growth of exciting situations from circumstance and character this " comedy," as the author labelled it, has been surpassed by no play of his time. Taken by itself, torn from its setting, the third act of *The Gay Lord Quex* equally merits that praise. But the other acts of *Quex* are inferior. They are merely preparatory and valedictory. One forgets what is in them. *His House in Order* moves steadily

from the first words that are spoken to the last, the interest never at any point wears thin. The plot seems simple, the incidents appear to follow one another inevitably. Yet beneath this smooth development of the story can be seen by any student of dramaturgy the contrivance of a master hand.

The play opens on the eve of a great event in a small town. A park given to the townsfolk in memory of the wife of a prominent landowner and politician who lives near by, is to be opened by the giver, her husband. He has staying with him for the ceremony her father and mother, and a brother-in-law. He has living with him, to keep his house in order, a sister-in-law. He has married again, and his second choice has disappointed him. Nina was his little boy's governess, a pretty, wayward, charming but not at all a practical girl, spoiled by her father, an indulgent old parson, who left her nothing a year to live on when he died.

To his brother, a diplomatist, who happens to have come to England on leave, just in time for the ceremony, Filmer Jesson, M.P., explains his grounds for thinking that he has committed "an egregious blunder." When he says that he expected her to keep his house in order, as his first wife Annabel did so admirably, he is not referring "solely to the petty details of mere housekeeping."

> The phrase comprises in my mind the regular, methodical conduct of life generally, social as well as domestic. When I ask that my house shall be in order, I am asking not only that my luncheon, my dinner, shall be decently and punctually

served; not only that this inkstand, this paper-knife, may be found invariably in the same place; but that every wheel of the mechanism of my private affairs, however minute, shall be duly oiled and preserved from grit. I am asking that the impression of home and its surroundings formed by my son in boyhood shall be such as will influence him in after years to his mental and moral advantage; in short, that I may be permitted to pursue my public career in complete confidence that nothing—nothing—outside that career is liable to the slightest confusion and derangement. That is what I intend to convey by "my house in order."

It is, as Hilary remarks, "a precious tall order too." Hilary is a man of the big world. He knows his brother for a prig and pedant. He feels sorry for Nina even before he has made her acquaintance. He can guess what she has been through.

Filmer did not, he explains, expect to find in her the exceptional abilities of his first wife—of poor Annabel.

No, what I did was to persuade myself that I could engraft certain of Annabel's qualities upon Nina; that I could create in Nina a second nature, as it were.

He does not blame her, he blames himself.

I have been cruelly unjust all round, I fear—unjust to Annabel's memory, unjust to Derek, unjust to Nina herself.

HILARY.

To the poor little fish-out-of-water. And she has proved quite unreceptive has Mrs. Nina? Quite?

FILMER

Utterly! Petted, spoilt, undisciplined, the playmate from babyhood of a foolish indulgent father—oh, utterly.

That is why Filmer asked Geraldine, Annabel's

sister, to take charge of his domestic arrangements. She is a cold, capable creature, with a disapproving dislike of Nina, all the more disdainful because Nina has not the spirit to stand up for herself. Geraldine lets pass no opportunity to humiliate the girl; even encourages the little boy to slight and look down on his stepmother. Nina feels herself alone in the household and consoles herself with a number of dogs which are a frequent cause of squabbling between herself and Geraldine.

Thus Nina is made to feel that she is, as she puts it to Hilary, "an out-and-out hideous failure."

> I've been tried and condemned. They've pronounced me hopelessly incompetent and sentenced me to take a back seat.

She could have learnt, she could have grown into her husband's ways "if the conditions had been favourable." If there had been no first wife, no paragon for the second to be compared with, always to her disadvantage.

As for the old Ridgleys, Hilary describes them as "posts of humanity," belonging to a class which "brings everything that's good in the world—virtue and charity and religion—into odium and contempt." Sir Daniel, "the large colliery owner," is stupid; his wife is ill-natured; their son is both.

One more guest for the opening of the park is Major Maurewarde, a big, handsome, stern-faced man of forty-three. He is known among his friends as "Sulks Maurewarde," but to Derek he is "Maurry"; with the little chap he never sulks.

Photo Bertram Park]

MISS GLADYS COOPER

in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* which she revived with success many years after its first production.

They have a very warm affection for each other. "When we are out walking," Derek says, "he often squeezes my hand tight and asks me not to speak to him for a little while."

GERALDINE

Maurewarde has altered of late years. I think he felt our loss very deeply.

LADY RIDGELEY

A man doesn't carry the weight of other people's losses about with him to that extent.

GERALDINE

Not when he is closely associated with the people?

LADY RIDGELEY

Well, on the whole he has improved perhaps. I used to consider his manners highly objectionable.

DEREK

Mamma didn't.

LADY RIDGELEY

Eh?

DEREK

Mamma liked Maurry.

LADY RIDGELEY

Your poor mother?

DEREK

Yes, mamma liked Maurry very, very much indeed.

GERALDINE

You are drawing on your imagination, Derek. How can you possibly remember?

DEREK

I *do* remember.

LADY RIDGELEY

It's not improbable, Geraldine. My girl was tolerant of every living soul. [*Producing a black-bordered handkerchief.*] She was charity and forbearance personified.

DEREK. [*Thoughtfully*]

I was rather young of course when mamma was alive, but I do remember.

GERALDINE

What?

DEREK

I can't exactly say *what* I remember, Aunt Geraldine. Only I know—I *know*.

LADY RIDGELEY. [*Furtively wiping her eyes*]

You know——?

DEREK

Somehow I know that Maurry was mamma's chum just as he is mine.

Curiosity is thus aroused. What is going to happen? What will be revealed? And how is development of the plot to be affected by the question whether Derek shall have for a schoolroom his mother's boudoir, kept closed until now, exactly as she left it before she went out for that afternoon drive which ended with a fatal accident?

Geraldine proposes this, though she has opposed all Nina's efforts to get the room into use again. The child ought to have more sunshine. The doctor has said so. But Nina denounces it furiously as a trick of Geraldine's.

A mean trick! She knew there was a chance—just a chance—a danger—of my being given the key of her sister's boudoir some day, if I behaved myself decently; and so she has managed to push Derek in there, to spite me and shut me out of it for good and all!

Her outburst causes consternation. But she goes on:

I wasn't even told—not even told! Did you mention it at

lunch, any of you? Not you! It leaks out. It's shameful, infamous!

FILMER. [*To* NINA]

You are beside yourself. . . . To-morrow you will be sorry——

NINA

To-morrow! The park! [*Starting to her feet and addressing everybody but Hilary.*] Ah, yes, there's one bit of revenge I can take; there's one slight I can put upon you. I go to no park to-morrow; as God hears me, I do not! There's no possible indignity that hasn't been heaped on me, and in return I'll show my contempt—show it publicly by my absence—my contempt for your park and those connected with it! Good night!

Next morning Nina sticks to her resolve. She wears a pretty dress of bright pink instead of mourning, like the others. Filmer has asked her to "eat humble pie, top crust and all." That is her description of his request. Filmer admits that in effect this is correct, though "I do not myself consider it wanting in courtesy or moderation." But they need not imagine, Nina says, that her husband can "talk her over, lecture her like a naughty child till she is all tears and obedience. That sort of thing is at an end."

She will not listen to Hilary either, though she likes him, and knows he is friendly to her. She knows what upsets Filmer—why everybody is in such a ferment.

Is it because they've a particular affection for me, because they reckon me one of themselves, that they are disturbed by my refusing to assist at the opening of the park? Not it! Filmer is dejected simply by the gossip my absence will give rise to—the scandal. There's a screw loose somewhere,

people will remark—those who haven't arrived at that conclusion already. And the newspapers! He sees the nasty innuendo in the newspaper reports.

"I do," groans Filmer. The politician's mind is tortured by the prospect.

> You are all upset [Nina goes on] because you are deprived of the gratification of inflicting a grand crowning humiliation upon me; because you can't drag me to the park and exhibit me to the quizzing crowd, saying to yourselves: "See! We've brought the failure with us; we have brought with us Mr. Filmer Jesson's matrimonial blunder; to do honour to Annabel Mary Ridgeley that was, whose shoe strings she is not worthy to have tied!" Oh, thank God, I can rob you of that triumph at least.

From that position neither Filmer nor Hilary can move her. They are both angry. They leave her to herself.

In comes Derek. He has been rummaging about in his new schoolroom. He has found a little bag in a cupboard. He puts it down, says nothing of it, for some time Nina does not notice it. Then she picks it up and inquires where it came from.

"It's mamma's," Derek tells her; he goes on to explain how he found it—underneath the boards at the bottom of the cupboard. He saw a mouse run through a crack in the floor "and when I slipped my hand in to get at the mouse, I touched *that*. The board came up quite easily."

Derek has not managed to open the bag. Nina finds the spring, takes out letters, looks at them—casually at first, then with absorbed attention. Derek, without knowledge that the bag had anything

in it, takes it to his father. Nina reads the letters carefully, four of them, then calls Hilary. She repeats to him Derek's account of their discovery. She tells him she opened the bag and examined what was in it.

HILARY. [*Raising his eyebrows*]
You did?

NINA
Why not? I had no suspicion I should light on anything disagreeable.

HILARY
Disagreeable?

NINA
Anything *she* had meant to hide. It didn't occur to me—underneath the floor in her sanctum——

HILARY
And what *did* you come upon? . . . No, no, no, I've no wish to hear.

NINA
But you must hear. You have to hear. [*Distinctly.*] Some letters.

HILARY
Ah?

NINA
These four letters. [*A pause.*] I've read them. . . . Scandalous, isn't it? At the same time I advise you not to waste your scorn on me, Mr. Jesson, unless you've an unlimited stock of it at your disposal [*fingering the letters*]. They are from Major Maurewarde.

HILARY. [*With polite indifference*]
From Major Maurewarde?

NINA
To her.

HILARY
I dare say.

NINA

Such letters!

HILARY

Major Maurewarde is a very old and close friend of my brother——

NINA

Friend!

HILARY

And of mine. We regard him—you know it as well as I do—we regard him almost as a member of our family.

NINA

Almost!

HILARY

I can quite understand, Mrs. Filmer, that your present frame of mind disposes you to detect evil in matters of a perfectly innocent kind——

NINA

Innocent? Oh, why beat about the bush? This immaculate lady, the sainted Annabel—your stained-glass-window sister-in-law——

HILARY. [*Quietly*]

For shame.

NINA

She was nothing but Maurewarde's—woman. [*There is a pause during which neither moves.*] Yes, and Derek—the boy—is his son.

Hilary refuses to believe the story. Very well, she will convince him. She makes him sit down beside her and read the letters through. When he has done that, he asks her pardon for thinking she was inclined to twist innocent things into guilty ones. There is no doubt about the relation between Annabel and Maurewarde. And what a mercy it is that she took the letters out! When Derek gives the bag to his father it will be empty.

A mercy? Nina does not quite understand him.

Well, he explains, no one else need ever know.

Oh, but Nina means to tell them. She will copy them out while they have gone to the park, then put the copy into an envelope with a note explaining how the originals came into her possession, and this will be given to Geraldine directly she returns.

HILARY. [*Between his teeth*]

And hit my brother a blow from which he will never recover; and bastardize the boy; and drag——

NINA

Oh, no, no, you're a great deal too quick. I'm not hurting Filmer, much as he has hurt me—or the boy. Except for Maurewarde, the secret will be yours and mine—and the Ridgeleys! Trust them to keep it. It's the Ridgeleys I'm aiming my blow at. The Ridgeleys! The Ridgeleys!

HILARY

Geraldine will tell her people, you think?

NINA

I should say she will be forced to sooner or later.

HILARY

Forced?

NINA

To account for the alteration in her attitude towards me; to convince them of the necessity for a total change of attitude on their part. [*Sitting, triumphantly.*] Ah!

HILARY

I understand. Henceforth, down on their marrow-bones, eh—the whole Ridgeley family?

Yes, that is the idea. Especially Geraldine. Nina has been driven almost insane by her chilling contempt, by the torture she has inflicted.

Often and often I've cried myself to sleep after being tormented by Geraldine almost beyond endurance; cried half

through the night. Now it's her turn if she has a tear in her. *She* shall be meek and grovelling now to *me*. . . . I shan't be terrified any longer at her frown and her thin lips, but at a look from me she shall catch her breath—as I've done—and flush up and lower those steely grey eyes of hers.

Well, well, Hilary cannot ask her to feel sorry for the Ridgeleys very deeply—nor, if it comes to that, his brother. But what about Annabel? Doesn't that solitary figure in the tragical-comical picture of Filmer's earlier married life cry aloud to Nina to throw the letters into the fire and forget their contents?

No, Nina can feel no sympathy with Annabel. Not even when Hilary sketches the punishment she must have endured.

Why, read that scoundrel's letters again! "The past six or seven years have been hell upon earth," he says. To *him* hell upon earth. Were they pleasanter to *her*? He goes on to remind her, doesn't he, that both he and she were nearly broken by their sufferings. Piece it together, trace it from the start. A young woman carefully trained according to the narrow views of her parents—content, in her ignorance, with finding herself mistress of the ice-house my poor brother calls his home. Then—Maurewarde! Handsome, brave—heaven save the mark! ardent, *alive*! Then the first gleam of romance—and the drifting—and the surrender—and the awakening—and the agony of remorse—and the commencement, in cold blood, of the regular dreary game of deception. Then the child—the blessing turned to a curse. What a motherhood! Conceive it! The bitter tears shed silently upon the pillow, the inward writhings, the dumb cries for support; and after a time the resuming of her customary duties and of her place, opposite her husband, at his table. And once more, and to the finish, the mask chafing the face and the ceaseless guard over every word, and look, and gesture. Punishment!

No, Nina is not to be moved from her purpose by such pleading as that.

"You imagine this," she says, "you invent it. Of course he—Maurewarde—was full of his sufferings. He was persuading her to elope."

HILARY

While she, poor wretch, was shunning him, trying to shut her ears to him.

NINA

Shut her ears to him! She didn't even destroy his love letters. Why? Because she was studying them, pondering them; because she was weighing her desire to bolt against the advantage of continued "respectability." Phuh! you are wasting your sympathies, Mr. Jesson.

Then Hilary tries another line of persuasion. Not a very promising one. He suggests that Annabel "wasn't allowed to take the last desperate step" of eloping with her lover. He speaks of "Divine interposition," the "hand of God" frightening the horses and killing her in the crash which resulted from their running away.

A false ring about that. Nina detects it. "We must believe equally then," she counters, "that it's the hand of God that has brought these letters from their hiding-place and has delivered them to me."

Still the diplomatist has another card to play. He strikes a truer note this time. Has she ever known people to be happy "who, possessing power have employed it malevolently or uncharitably"?

Her position, he admits, is a difficult one, a hard one in many respects. The temptation which assails her is a temptation few could resist.

Still, *do* resist it. Things aren't so bad with you as to be beyond mending; on the contrary, I think it likely that, if you'll be patient, matters will eventually adjust themselves between you and Filmer. But I tell you, Nina, that at this moment you are in danger of putting the chances of happiness away from you irretrievably. More! I promise you that you can attain real happiness; attain the only solid happiness in this world; to-day by the act of renunciation I urge upon you. [*She stirs slightly. He draws nearer.*] Nina, there are some people walking the earth who are wearing a halo. It's invisible to you and me; *we* can't see it, but it's there, round their brows, none the less; and the glow of it lights the dark walls of their lives, and sustains them through pain and oppression and tribulation. They are the people who have made sacrifices; who've been tempted and have conquered; who have been offered a sword or a sceptre or a bludgeon, and who have shaken their heads and passed on. They are the people who have *renounced*. Nina, be among those who wear the halo. Burn Maurewarde's letters, my dear [*glancing at the cold grate*] or give them to me—and forget you've ever read them.

That appeal succeeds. As Nina listened, the tears gathered in her eyes.

When he has finished, she hands him the letters. "I'll forget them," she promises. And then, hearing the carriage, she decides, in her softened, humbled state, to go to the park after all. "Ask Filmer to wait a few minutes for me," she says to Hilary and runs to change her dress.

That might have been the end of the play—except for a last act, needless but customary, which should just round off the situation. Most plays end before their authors have done with them. Few authors know how to stop when their spectators have seen what the end is to be. Pinero at this period was far

too capable a craftsman, had far too self-respecting a character, to write a word too much in his dialogue, let alone an act too much in his piece. The fourth act of *His House in Order* was as tense, as interesting, as the other three. It kept the spectator uncertain as to what would happen until the last moment of the play.

First, Hilary settled with Maurewarde. He had sent him a telegram. It was delivered at lunch. It said: "Return at once, important." This is to provide Maurewarde "with a decent excuse for clearing out." The scene between the men is perfect in its luminous restraint.

MAUREWARDE

Clearing out?

HILARY

For ever, so far as this household is concerned. [*Sternly.*] Go, man; and don't show your face here again—here or in my brother's house in London. Vanish, pass out of his life.

MAUREWARDE. [*Steadily*]

Something has been found?

HILARY. [*Turning the leaves of a railway guide*]

Yes.

MAUREWARDE

What?

HILARY

Letters.

MAUREWARDE

Whose letters?

HILARY

Yours—to Annabel. There's a train at two-forty.

MAUREWARDE

Who found them?

HILARY

Nina—Mrs. Filmer; this morning. Reaches St. Pancras five fifty-two.

MAUREWARDE

Where were they?

HILARY. [*Replacing the railway guide*]

Concealed in a cupboard in the boudoir. [*Looking at his watch.*] You've ample time to change. Your servant can pack and follow you later.

MAUREWARDE

The letters? Are they—deadly?

HILARY

Deadly.

MAUREWARDE

Will Mrs. Filmer keep quiet or split?

HILARY

She'll keep quiet [*significantly*] unless——

MAUREWARDE

She's told *you*.

HILARY

She could scarcely do *this* job herself.

MAUREWARDE

That's true. She must be a good sort, Jesson—considering the way they treat her.

HILARY

She *is* a good sort.

MAUREWARDE

I asked whether she'd split because, if she did, and your brother wished to have a shot at me I—I'd give him every chance

HILARY

I'm afraid we can't afford you that glory.

MAUREWARDE

Perhaps it's best as it is—for the sake of—others.

He means for the sake of one other. To part from Derek, his little son, the boy who has filled his lonely life with affection, he finds bitterly hard. Their farewells are made—for ever—and he goes.

Not so easy is it for Hilary to clear the house of Ridgeleys. Geraldine seems to be a fixture. Filmer will not hear of her going. He has painful recollections of "depriving himself of her services once—when he re-married" and "of the chaos that ensued." It is a nightmare to him still. Geraldine must certainly remain, but Hilary need not speak as if the entire Ridgeley family lived under his roof.

"It does," Hilary retorts, "its spirit dominates your household in the person of Geraldine. So long as her influence is upon you and on your surroundings, you are in effect swayed and controlled by the lot of 'em."

No use talking. Filmer finds his sister-in-law indispensable. What is to be done?

There is nothing for it but to tell him what Nina has discovered. Deliberately Hilary takes the letters from his breast-pocket.

HILARY. [*In a low firm voice*]

Filmer. [FILMER *goes to him with raised eyebrows.*] The little bag that Derek brought to you this morning—that little bag——

FILMER

Yes.

HILARY

The boy explained, I suppose——

FILMER

Yes. It was Annabel's.

HILARY. [*Nodding*]

Annabel's.

FILMER

How it came to be in the place where he found it, I can't conjecture.

HILARY

These letters were in it.

FILMER

Letters! Derek didn't tell me——

HILARY

He didn't know, *doesn't* know. He left the bag lying on that table and while his back was turned Nina opened it.

FILMER

What letters are they?

HILARY

Letters from Maurewarde.

FILMER

From Guy?

HILARY

From Maurewarde. [*Slowly.*] I've kicked him out. The telegram from town was a fiction. I've kicked him out.

FILMER. [*Bewildered, pointing to the letters*]

Because of—something——?

HILARY

Because of these—horrible——

FILMER

Horrible——?

Then Hilary tells him quietly: "They were written by Maurewarde to your late wife," and hands the letters to him.

At first Filmer declares them forgeries, transparent forgeries. It is a base trick, he declares, a conspiracy. But as he reads he knows the letters are

genuine. He must have full proof though. Suddenly he starts to his feet.

FILMER

Maurewarde——! Maurewarde——! [*Gripping Hilary's arm.*] What—what did Maurewarde say? [*Shouting.*] I want to hear what Maurewarde said.

HILARY. [*Turning to him—quietly*]

I kicked him out. He'll leave the country. He let me kick him out.

At this Filmer collapses. But his ordeal has only begun. Now, Hilary suggests, "it's the living that you must think of. You have to do justice to the living, make amends to the living."

In broken words Filmer acknowledges that Nina has been kind and generous.

"I believe her," Hilary tells him warmly, "to be one of the finest creatures on God's earth. And at this moment—misunderstood, under-rated, wronged; and with the power of bringing her enemies to her feet if she chose to exert it—she's humbling herself still further to these people."

Nina, indeed, is almost overdoing it. She gives up her dogs, she gives up smoking. She kisses the Ridgeley rod. But at last her husband sees what he owes to her. He tells Annabel's relations: "We have honoured the dead, we have discharged a debt—so far as such a debt can be discharged, and now—there is the living—the living." By the living, he continues, he means—especially—Nina. "For reasons known to you she has stood aside during the greater part of our short married life. From

to-day those reasons cease to have weight with me. I have been—thinking. Order, method, regularity, natural to Annabel, are not natural to Nina. Nina may acquire them or she may not. But whether she acquires them or whether she does not, it is her right that she should be mistress of my house. (*To the Ridgeleys*): I thank you—thank you all—for the help you have given me. My obligation to Geraldine is indeed deep. Let us—my wife and I—let us often welcome you—here and in London—as our guests."

The Ridgeleys take it well. Filmer and Nina are left hand in hand upon the settee before the fire, where the letters still smoulder into grey ash. They will try to make a fresh start.

Again in this piece Miss Irene Vanbrugh owed Pinero gratitude for an effective part and earned his thanks by her clever, forceful playing of it. She emphasized less the weak character of Nina than the core of hard matter which underlay surface triviality. That made the child-wife more interesting. It was the author's conception of the part; he was fortunate in securing the aid of an actress who could grasp and embody it. George Alexander was an urbane, diplomatic Hilary, and as the husband Herbert Waring gave one of the best performances in his long career. He made the spectator understand how unpleasant a cold, priggish politician Filmer Jesson could be; yet managed to win a shade of sympathy for him too.

Though one mocks at and even dislikes Sir Willoughby Patterne, one is forced to feel a little sorry

when Meredith's Egoist finds his well-ordered life falling into confusion. So it was here.

Considered as a piece of stage craftsmanship *His House in Order* could scarcely be improved upon. It gripped audiences for a long time. Yet critical pens wrote slightingly about it. People were beginning to expect in the theatre something more than technique. Shaw had by this time popularized the play of ideas—odd, one-sided ideas though they might be. In this year (1906) were produced *The Charity that Began at Home*, by St. John Hankin, and Galsworthy's *Silver Box*. Even the sedate and lumbering *Annual Register* fell into the error of comparing like with unlike. It described *His House in Order* as "A well constructed conventional play with the lights and shadows well defined. . . . Neither the characters nor the situations have much in common with real life. . . . There is a want of spontaneity about the principal scenes which makes them theatrical rather than dramatic."

This was unfair, but not unnatural. Going from the rarefied exhilarating atmosphere of the Court Theatre during the Barker-Vedrenne management, it was difficult to breathe contentedly the more commonplace air at the St. James's. This prevented critics so affected from seeing that there was in this play something which had always been rare in Pinero's work—a touch of beauty, the beauty of Nina's renunciation. That would have been a stronger touch had Nina from the first decided to destroy them, had she been urged by some other character to use

them revengefully and refused. However, that would have been unlike a Pinero creation, though later in *The Thunderbolt* he did bring in a character, almost the only one in his vast gallery, excepting Noel Brice in *The Hobby Horse*, with impulses naturally kind, generous, self-sacrificing. Nina even has to be persuaded to do the right thing, and Hilary, who persuades her is thinking not about the rightness of it so much as about the dreadful consequences to his family if it were not done.

Ibsen was once asked why he made almost every one of his characters either foolish or vicious.

"There are, you know," said the friend who remonstrated with him, "there are good potatoes and bad potatoes."

"I am afraid," the dramatist replied, "that only the bad ones have come under my observation."

If Pinero's serious plays were to be taken as showing his view of human nature, they would drive one to the conclusion that his experience and Ibsen's had been the same.

But Pinero would say, I think, that, while he has met and known and admired many "good potatoes," he does not find among them such useful material for plays as exists among the "bad potatoes." That perhaps is why in his work there is no idealizing of character, and of what I have called beauty very little indeed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

METHODS OF WORK

"Such success as I have obtained I attribute to small powers of observation and great patience and perseverance."—PINERO on himself.

AFTER that description of the play which, in his fifty-first year, touched the peak of his theatrical craftsmanship, we may suitably go on to glance at Pinero's methods of work. But before we do that a glance at the man himself may be permitted. Here is a picture of him given about this period by an American writer:

"A man of a little more than medium height, not in any way stout but not abnormally thin; of well-knit, capable frame; a figure that suits a horseman, a bicyclist, a golfer, for Pinero is all of these and some others. He is quite an expert bicyclist.

"His head and face are both peculiar and striking. One could never fail to recognize him in the flesh, having once seen his portrait. He is extremely bald, so that there is no mistaking his craniological peculiarities. A head something like an enormous egg. A masterful face whose main characteristics are of insight, astuteness, and above all of subtlety.

"His forehead falls back over an enormous frontal sinus, that ridge of bone above the eye-brows which phrenologists take to mean a 'power of distinguishing slight differences'; which being applied to use becomes practically knowledge of character. His

eyebrows are wide and thick and strong, indeed of such size and manner as to become a necessary part of caricature and even of the delineation of exact character."

It might have been added that Pinero was an enthusiastic cricketer; he has always kept himself fit and hard by open-air exercise. His eyes tell one that.

Strange that this writer should have forgotten the eyes. They give the clearest indication of Pinero's character. Eyes that miss nothing—yet perceive nothing, it would seem, which does not present itself materially to them. Eyes that would suit a lawyer accustomed to unravel the tangles of the law, or a doctor with a passion for research. Eyes now hooded by their heavy lids, now wide open to observe or encourage or protest.

In order to observe the better, he was living at this time in a flat in Hanover Square, the heart of the then fashionable part of London. When he began to make his name as dramatist, he had a little house at Bedford Park, the suburb built, in the early days of reaction against the ugliness of mid-Victorian house-building, by an architect of imagination, Norman Shaw. Later he moved to St. John's Wood, a district much affected by artists and actors. First he lived in a little house opposite Lord's cricket ground, then in a large one on Hamilton Terrace. In Hanover Square he did some of his best work and spent the happiest years of his life, years which mellowed his temperament, smoothed out some of the furrows

SIR ARTHUR PINERO

[at rehearsal, a sketch by the late Claude Shepperson.

which had been ploughed into his mind by disillusion and the study of abnormal types.

From his early years the sharpness of tongue which made him both admired and feared was a symptom of reflective habit tinged with bitterness. "It is folly," he wrote to a friend in 1884, "to wish men a Happy Christmas—one can only wish for happy oblivion to its dismal memories and a freedom from its accompanying train of forebodings." A passing mood, perhaps, but one which passed frequently in those days of struggle, of hard experience, not seldom of disappointment.

For although Pinero's career, looked at as a long road from the elevation of his seventy-fifth birthday, may seem to have run straight and to have been clear of obstacles, there have at all periods been many obstructions to get round, many detours to be made, many galling delays to be endured. No man was ever less inclined than Pinero to sink into a rut, to wear a label and act up to it, to go on doing to-day what he did yesterday—even though he did it with glittering success. Men of the restless, adventurous, experimental temperament meet always with numerous checks, from which those who plod along, doing what is expected of them, never causing surprise or discomfort, are comfortably free.

As success came to him more and more often, as his experiments usually turned out well, so the gall in Pinero's nature was diminished (though it never disappeared).

He wrote to the American manager, Augustin

Daly, after a play (*The Cabinet Minister*) had failed in New York:

"I think with you that the wise course is to dismiss disasters from one's mind.

"After a while the process becomes a mechanical matter and it is possible to defy misfortune."

He had by this time hardened himself against "dismal memories." He grew a thick shell over his deeper feelings, even over his inner thoughts. One who has known him for thirty years admits that he would have the greatest difficulty in writing a "personal sketch" of his friend. "I really know very little about him," he says.

Pinero is mentioned, of course, in all the more notable theatrical memoirs and biographies of his time. Yet in scarcely one of these is any light thrown on his personality. He had numberless friends; few, if any, were intimates, grappled to his soul. They were men of varied interests and occupations. One was Marshall Hall, the prominent criminal lawyer, to whom he would send telegrams of congratulation on verdicts won and from whom he would receive notes of thanks beginning "My dear Pin," and ending "yours as ever, Marshall." But, affectionately as they felt towards one another—there is no doubt of Sir Arthur's warm heart, his sensitive emotions—they seldom talked of anything but the cases in which the advocate was engaged.

Crime has always interested Pinero. In the courts one can find drama in the raw. Trials were and still

are a fascination to him, though a slight deafness has diminished the frequency of his attendance at celebrated cases, as it keeps him away from the theatre. In a room he can hear every word spoken, so it be sounded distinctly and the speaker not far off. The pleasure of conversing is happily not denied him—he himself talks as briskly and with the same keen intelligence as ever.

For Society in the limited meaning of the word he has never cared.

As he became famous, all doors opened to him. At Marienbad King Edward would ask him to lunch or dinner. He was regarded, not only as a man of the theatre, but, after he had begun to publish his plays, as a man of letters: and he was the first dramatist of the nineteenth century to be so regarded, excepting a few poets who wrote occasional plays.

But Pinero was not seen a great deal in the company of either fashionable or literary folk. He was happy in his home with his wife (once known on the stage as a clever and charming actress under the name of Myra Holme) and his step-children, a son and a daughter. He was very often to be found at the Garrick Club. That he is a thoroughly "clubbable" man is proved by all his friends calling him "Pin." He had an old Sussex farmstead for a country house. He was not a regular diner-out. He had no taste for evening parties—indeed he did a great deal of his writing at night.

Regularly he would sit down at his big magnificent desk-table—just as regularly as he had once been

accustomed to go to the theatre to act. Everything on the table must be in its accustomed place, no disorder or confusion ever marred its stately precision. Tidiness is a passion with Pinero. In his dress he has always been exact and neat. In every habit he is orderly. He believes that most of the evil in the world comes, in Kipling's phrases:

> All along o' dirtiness, all along o' mess,
> All along o' doin' things rather more or less.

A friend, lunching with him one day at Hanover Square, noticed he was disturbed, uneasy. The cause was a piece of newspaper which had been blown against the railings outside the window. Pinero could only settle down comfortably when it had been removed by a servant and brought indoors to be burned.

Meticulous then were his working habits. Not until he had carefully prepared the substance of what he intended to write did his pen touch paper. "When I have sketched out a play," he told Charles Frohman once, "I go and live with the characters."

Frohman was trying to write a play himself and had asked for advice. That was the advice Pinero gave him. They were friends as well as business associates. Pinero never had a contract with the clever little Jewish-American manager who handled so much of his work. He knew he could trust him without reservation. Frohman repaid this confidence, not merely by doing his best for his friend's plays, but by whole-hearted admiration. He gave this account of the way Pinero worked:

"It is with the utmost precision and only after a solid year or two of reflection that he will begin to write. Then the work proceeds with all the deliberation and deftness of a superb architect laying the ground-work of a building that, once sketched out in the flat, must inevitably rise in but one way.

"Pinero's plays are like perfectly woven tapestries. They read brilliantly which ever side is looked at. Or they are like perfectly proportioned mosaics, each word perfectly placed in each sentence, each speech deftly thought out, exquisitely chiselled and always contributing to the whole; each act a combination of cumulative scenes, and the whole moving, like the inevitable march of Fate, to a conclusion that is about as easy to deny as the total sum of a correctly added column of figures."

That betrayed an amusing ignorance of architecture and tapestry, but Frohman did understand something about plays; his testimony is of value.

Pinero has no belief in what is called a "scenario." He has always advised young writers for the stage to avoid "composing a rough draft first and holding themselves bound by it." That, he considers, "carpenter's work, belonging to a lower form of composition."

When he had chosen a theme—but how did he choose that? Not in peaceful surroundings, not in a quiet country place where there are no interruptions or distractions. Such a place he needed later when he came to work themes out. But

"I must start my theme in a city. I must have life around me—eager, strenuous, pulsating life. It may

be in a crowded thoroughfare. It may be in my own room at night with the sense of life around me, with the hum and roar of movement and traffic coming up to me from below. It is only then that my brain quickens to creative work."

When the theme was decided upon, when the general aspect of it had taken shape, then "I have to get away somewhere all by myself." This was not for the purpose of working all day long, but to make concentration more easy. Actually he worked, as a rule, not more than three or four hours a day. He could work under pressure, if that were necessary. He wrote the three acts of *Lords and Commons* in three weeks. He did not take much longer than this over *Dandy Dick*.

He was under contract in 1887 to let the Court Theatre have a farce to follow *The Schoolmistress*. When it was asked for, he had nothing ready. He had written something, but he did not think it good enough. So he set to work on another theme and produced *Dandy Dick* just in time to fill the gap and to be one of the favourite plays of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Year. That it lost nothing by being quickly written was further emphasized by the laughter its characters and situations provoked when the farce was revived by Sir Nigel Playfair in this present year (1930).

But Pinero maintains that in ordinary circumstances a dramatist should find three to four hours' work a day enough. "That is quite as long as the mind can remain fresh and is content to be concen-

trated. When the mind is getting wearied it becomes rebellious to details—and a play is all details."

He liked to work either in the late afternoon or at night. His habit was to dine in the middle of the day (a habit acquired when he was an actor); at nine or so he would take a light supper, then go on working. This, too, was due to habit.

"In my early years of writing, while I was still an actor, my hours were of necessity late. In the morning I was rehearsing or studying my part; then, after the early dinner which is necessary in the routine of an actor's life, I rested to prepare for my night's work. Therefore, my only time, the only time I could depend on for play-writing, was late at night."

Many years ago an American journalist asked him:

"Do you find your work influenced—helped or hampered—by your experience as an actor?"

"That is a big question," he answered, "and certain things have to be explained before it can be answered. On the one hand I should say that the dramatist who has been an actor is better able than others to overcome the difficulties of the craft; on the other, too intimate an acquaintance with the theatre and its associations is apt to narrow a man's view of life—to beget mere theatricalism. On the whole, however, practical experience of the actual theatre is of advantage to the playwright. It shows him, if he has eyes to see, that anything can be done on the stage by the man who knows how to do it.

"Yes, the art of the stage is illimitable. I read in some modern criticism of limitations of the stage. But to me there are limitations only of the author's capacity to deal with the technical difficulties of the

medium in which he has undertaken to work. Stevenson wrote that drama is falsification of life. That was because he never took pains to acquire the necessary theatrical technique. No! there need not be falsification, though there must be compression. A drama is an epitome; but because a thing is small in bulk it also is not necessarily imperfect. Perfection is not an attribute of size."

There prevailed an impression at one time that Pinero wrote parts for actor-managers, especially for John Hare and George Alexander. That he denies. He says that when he wrote he tried to dismiss from his mind all thoughts of actors and actresses. He tried not to think of the theatre even—unlike W. S. Gilbert who had a little model stage made and used to move his characters about on it as he wrote. If the characters of Lord Dangars, the Duke of St. Olpherts, the gay Lord Quex, are examined, they will be seen at once to be developments of a conception of Pinero's, sketched first in *The Profligate*, elaborated in Mrs. Ebbsmith, finally rounded off in the Quex play. They became "typical John Hare parts," but they were in truth typical Pinero parts played by Hare. The Dangars—St. Olpherts—Quex character was far from being "a Hare part" when Hare first undertook it. Hare was accustomed at that time to play genial old gentlemen, easily deceived, full of the milk of human kindness.

In the same way the parts supposed to have been written for Alexander were by no means in his particular line. Hilary Jesson might have been styled

much more correctly "a Charles Wyndham part." The shabby organist in *The Thunderbolt*, the novelist in *The Big Drum*, were far removed from Alexander's usual style.

There was a general belief that the part of Joseph Lebanon in *The Cabinet Minister* was written for Weedon Grossmith. But that actor told in his Memoirs how he went to ask for the part at Mrs. John Wood's suggestion, and was told by Pinero that it must be played by a big man. Grossmith at once declared that all the money-lenders he ever knew were small men. He went on to give an idea of the way he would act Lebanon and how he would dress the part. Pinero "never moved his eagle eyes from me," the actor wrote, "they seemed to bore through me like a gimlet." What he saw satisfied him. "Very well, come down to-morrow and have a try," he said. He gave up the big man conception, and let Grossmith have the part.

Equally emphatic is Pinero's repudiation of the notion that he wrote his plays "by rule." They have been praised so much for their craftsmanship, especially in the United States, as to give rise to the idea that he could explain the formula he used. American critical writers have devoted to this aspect of his work more attention than British. All have united in admiration of his skill. Mr. T. H. Dickinson in *The Contemporary Drama of England* (1920) went so far as to say: "It is likely that Pinero will be hailed as one of the first masters of the technique of English comedy."

Yet it has not been suggested that technical excellence alone accounts for his success in so many forms of drama. Professor William Lyon Phelps wrote: "Sir Arthur Pinero has earned his justly high reputation when he has given the best of his thought as well as of his technique to the undertaking" (*The Twentieth Century Theatre*). Mr. Clayton Hamilton said in one of his stimulating *Conversations on Contemporary Drama* (1924) that Pinero writes plays "with both the intellect and the emotions, so harmoniously blended that it is impossible to distinguish one from the other."

But no one rebuts with more vigour than Pinero himself the notion that he could say what rules he follows. "There are no rules," he declares roundly. "With every play I write I have to learn afresh the art of play-writing." The one quality a dramatist must possess, he holds, is intuition. The one discipline he must impose on himself is the discipline of logic.

"Without logic," he says, "there can be no art. The groundwork of a play, as well as of its character, must be logic. Cause—effect! The pendulum swings between the two. Two of the most substantial parts of the fabric which go to make up a fine play are logic and intuition. Without the first you can't construct a play. Without the second you can't write it!"

For intuition alone can give writers of fiction knowledge of what certain people will do in certain sets of circumstances. "It was what enabled Shake-

speare to create Portia, Beatrice, and the rest of his wonderful women." It is " understanding."

This view of his art explains why Pinero seldom altered anything at rehearsal. When he read a play to the company engaged to perform it, he read out everything that was necessary for the performance.

" All that we call ' business ' is in the printed matter which I carry into the theatre. Why should it be altered when it has all been carefully and even laboriously thought out, every detail of it, during the process of construction? The movements of a man and what he has to say are inseparable. Expression is multiform and simultaneous; to alter one phase is to weaken all. I try to think of these things beforehand. Rehearsal is not—or certainly should not be —a time for experiment. It is to prepare for the acting together of the players, not for the making of the play."

Yet rehearsals, as Pinero conducted them—he was his own producer always—were a very important factor indeed in the making of his plays. A play is not " made " entirely by its author. It is written to be acted. Upon the acting depends a large part of its successful presentation, and, in its turn, the acting depends largely on the tuition, the coaching of the actors by author or " producer."

For " producers " Pinero has no good word to say. He found no use for them himself in London. In New York he had to entrust his plays to other hands; and very carefully he scrutinized those hands before he agreed to employ them. Frohman wrote him an amusing letter in 1911, replying to one in which

Pinero had shown his anxiety in the matter of production.

"The man I have selected to produce your play," he said, "is Charles Frohman. He is not only good at producing plays that have never been staged before, but he likes your plays thoroughly. He feels confident of his ability to handle it and to make the changes you have made just as he thinks you and your public over here would like to have it done."

For all London first performances Pinero rehearsed his own plays, chose the performers, told them what he wanted—often showed them, patiently worked with them until the effect he sought was as perfect as he could expect it to be.

From Irving he had learned much of the art of instructing a company of actors and actresses; he had learned also a gentler method than his old chief had used.

Irving had a jovial rough way with him at rehearsal. It was effectual, but it sometimes alarmed, sometimes abashed beginners. He growled to Martin Harvey once: "Don't stand there, get back, get back. You are like a cabbage in the foreground of a beautiful landscape." To another he said sardonically after a vain attempt to teach him some gesture: "My God, my boy, you ought to be paying me for teaching you instead of expecting me to pay you."

Irving would act every character; he made his young players copy his tones, his movements. He taught them everything he knew. One young fellow could not manage a satisfactory laugh. "Of course

not, of course you can't," Irving said, " You've got your lungs full of air. Deflate your lungs, my boy, then throw your head back and laugh." At once the boy did it.

Pinero borrowed from Irving's method all that was of value in it. He " cut out all the rough stuff," however. After he had rehearsed many plays, he gave this advice to producers:

" Try to understand the individual temperament of each member of your cast and, if you can, adapt it to your needs. Remember, too, that actors and actresses are ' on their nerves ' all the time. Rehearsal is a trying time for them. They should be shown courtesy and consideration. Never be impatient. Be very sure of your own temper."

Those sentences should be shown in large type on every stage and in every rehearsal room.

Pinero has not only preached that doctrine, he practised it. Most of the intelligent players who have been rehearsed by him unite in gratitude for his kind patience and the help they got from his suggestions. That was one of the reasons why there was eagerness among actors and actresses to be engaged for his plays.

Yet here and there a voice has been heard complaining that he looks on actors and actresses as puppets.

" Pinero is mad on details, positions to a square inch, movements, inflections of voice, above all syllabic perfection in speaking the text. He treats his

performers like a lot of babies. He has a deep-rooted belief that actors can't think for themselves."

So wrote an actor-author (Hesketh Pearson) who had been rehearsed by Pinero. The dramatist was described as

" walking, head forward, in short quick steps, one hand behind his back and glowering under bushy and autocratically puckered eyebrows. He has a deep voice that would be useful during a cannonade. He smokes cigarettes incessantly, and for some reason never takes off his gloves." Like Clemenceau at the Peace Conference.

Frequently he had to insist on speaking up. " Speak to the man in the back row of the gallery." Once he left his usual place in the stalls, went up on to the stage and said: " I am so glad you are all enjoying the play, but why do you want to keep it all to yourselves? Do please let me hear some of it."

There was an amusing consequence one day of the exhortation, " Louder, louder." Pinero had just remonstrated " I can't hear a damned word." The next line in the play happened to be

Don't talk so loudly. They'll hear what we say.

The actor who had to speak these words bellowed them at the top of his voice. Even the author had to laugh!

Pinero was always considerate though. He would never, this critic admitted, have kept a company rehearsing till three a.m., as Shaw once did.

Another reason for the competition to secure

Pinero's parts was that his plays ran for at least a hundred performances. And yet another was that he wrote parts which gave good opportunities for acting. There his stage experience was of great service. He could calculate effects. He knew how to work up a scene. He could bring characters on and take them off effectively. There was solid stuff in them too; they did not require building up by those who played them.

" Pinero's characters," Mr. George Arliss, Hare's successor as the Duke of Olpherts, has written, " are always consistent, they maintain their individuality from beginning to end, which accounts in a large measure for the personal success scored by so many actors in Pinero parts."

In the play with which Mr. Arliss was associated there was a glaringly inconsistent character, Agnes Ebbsmith. But that is no matter. What Mr. Arliss testified truly is that Pinero parts are pleasant to play.

They are also easy to learn—as easy as Bernard Shaw's speeches are difficult. That is because Pinero arranges his words so that they may be spoken " trippingly upon the tongue." The order in which they come, the arrangement of the sentences " seems almost always to be natural," inevitable. He speaks his dialogue aloud as he writes it. If any passage of it looks stilted in print, read it out; it will probably sound then much more like the real thing.

In general, the dramatist acknowledges warmly the help his interpreters have given him. He does

not print with his published plays the names of those who played in them. That is because, in his view a play in a book ought to be judged as a play in a book, on its reading merits; to connect it with the play as performed on the stage would be irrelevant. The omission does not mean that he under-rates the share which the players have in a stage success.

On the other hand, he is a shrewd critic of the foibles of actor and actress. He tells with glee of the lady who put a "but" instead of an "and" into a sentence she had to speak. He gently called her down. She raised her brows and asked him languidly, "Does it matter?" He did not ask her to play in any other piece of his.

Sir Arthur, testified Mr. Arliss, "is notoriously good at selecting a cast." He certainly took trouble to secure players who would do justice to his work. When he was only thirty, and still had his name to make, he was writing thus to Augustin Daly, who brought out most of his earlier plays in the United States:

"With regard to Mr. Drew, if that gentleman can give us anything like what I want *Colonel Lukyn* to be, and what for the effect of the piece he must be, why, by all means let him play it. What reason can I have for objecting? All I have said and still say is that I fear Mr. Drew cannot give us the Lukyn we want and that Mr. Fisher perhaps can. And there I have left the question with you. . . . I shall be very glad to hear you are not angry with me past redemption."

As he gained in reputation and authority Pinero

named his own interpreters. However high they stood in their profession, he exercised the right to tell them exactly what he wanted them to do. He went to Cyril Maude's dressing-room, for instance, to alter the make-up for Sir Fletcher Portwood. He did it, Mr. Maude says, in a very clever way, pinning "little locks of hair here and there into my wig." No detail was too small for his watchful eye to notice. When Lewis Waller was rehearsing in *The Profligate* Pinero noticed that instead of pronouncing English "Inglish" in the ordinary way he adopted the pronunciation "Eng-glish," which was just then in vogue among a few purists. He corrected this once. Waller took no notice. The next time he came to the word the actor said "Eng-glish" and glanced defiantly at the author in the front row of the stalls. Pinero said nothing. Waller continued to glare. Everyone looked at him. Then Pinero's deep voice came booming from below: "All right, Waller. I don't want to cut any of your laughs." After that Waller said "Inglish."

Yet this attention to small matters did not make his production niggling. He kept the broad effects in view as well. "He had supreme skill," the Bancrofts said in their *Reminiscences* "in giving all concerned a clear insight into the value of his characters —an art rarely possessed in the highest degree but by author-actors or, for instance, Robertson and Boucicault."

The mention of Dion Boucicault the father recalls Pinero's close friendship with Dion (Dot) Boucicault

the son. Especially after the death of Lady Pinero, in 1919, he was much in the company of this old companion, and drew consolation from it. Boucicault was the one producer whom he excepted from his slighting opinion of that branch of theatrical industry. They were agreed on many points, among them this one: that the stage should not aim at exact reproduction of life. "Acting," Pinero holds, "is an imitation of life, and must imitate it so that the man at the back of the gallery can follow without difficulty."

The imitation, too, must be directed to the aim of making the spectators feel. Stimulation of the intellect can be applied more fitly by books, read in solitude. The nature of the dramatic appeal, the presence of a number of spectators, are specially suited to the exercise of influence on the heart and the imagination. Pinero maintains, therefore, that dramatists should tell stories "so as to give rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect which it is the theatre's one great function to produce."

William Archer, whom he counted among "the most honest, upright kindly men I have ever known" (an estimate every friend of Archer will endorse), once twitted him with taking his "slices of life" exclusively from those strata of society where people are titled and wealthy. Later he wrote *The Thunderbolt* and other pieces which proved that he could make a middle-class environment equally interesting. But at the time (1904) he defended his practice.

" I think you would find," he said, " if you tried to write drama, not only that wealth and leisure are more productive of dramatic complications than poverty and hard work, but that, if you want to get a certain order of ideas expressed or questions discussed, you must go pretty well up in the social scale."

His opinion has been modified since he expressed it in that form: that is accounted for, perhaps, by the change in the position which titled and wealthy people now occupy. He has not put one into a play for some time past. They are not important. No longer do they form a social and intellectual aristocracy: such leadership no longer exists. A dramatist who has so carefully noted always the features of the changing age could not overlook that.

On another point Sir Arthur remains of the same opinion still: he does not think it is at all necessary to be " so frank," so " out-spoken," so " shocking " as dramatists now are.

" Ah, you may smile, but there are plenty of people left who are capable of being shocked, and there is a competition in sensationalism to see who can shock them most. I don't deny that we used to go too far in the opposite sense. Our public may have been too fearful of the truth of life—too mealy-mouthed if you like. But we have rushed lately to the opposite extreme.

" It isn't necessary. You can make your characters say anything, do anything, you can develop any situation so long as you do it discreetly. I was never prevented from saying what I wanted to say or

tackling any subject that attracted me either by the Censorship or by public opinion.

"But then I had no desire to make any members of my audience wince, which is what many plays of the past few years seem to aim at doing. It was not necessary in my time for managers to rely on pieces which were sensational in their appeal.

"Look at the difference between the finance of the theatre then and now. Expenses have gone up enormously. In the 'seventies' of last century a leading actor or actress would be glad of twenty pounds a week. Now that is paid to a subordinate actor for speaking only twenty lines. The author's fee used to be three pounds a performance. That has increased. I admit I helped to increase it. Rents of theatres are enormously greater than they were. What is the consequence? Managers must have their houses filled every night if loss is to be avoided.

"When I took a piece to Hare, to Alexander, I used to say 'Are you ready to risk failure?' They almost always said Yes. And mind you, there was risk. There is always doubt about a play into which an author has put his best work without thinking of anything else. Nowadays managers cannot afford to take risks—of that kind.

"My old friend Sir Squire Bancroft used to make it a rule that expenses should not exceed one-third of the holding capacity of his theatre. If it held £1200 a week, he would not spend more than £400 in salaries and so on. He could well afford to play to houses which were not full every night. The theatrical spectator of the present time must have all his seats filled at every performance. Believe me, there is much to be said for the actor-manager system which was so heartily abused in its day."

The actor-managers, it must be remembered, were Pinero's friends and old associates. He grew up with them. But, even when we allow for this, there is force in his contention that the state of the theatre was more favourable for the dramatist towards the end of last century than it is to-day.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE THUNDERBOLT AND *MID-CHANNEL*

" Pinero's is an original, individual talent if ever there was one."—A. B. WALKLEY in his criticism of *The Thunderbolt* for *The Times*.

IT was Walkley's friend, the critic William Archer, who saw " the quality of genius " in Pinero's work and gibed at all who doubted the accuracy of his vision as " the victims of paralysing prejudice." Archer believed Stephen Phillips to be a genius and actually talked Walkley into saying that *he* did, which he did not. Walkley was right about Phillips (though the poet threw off sparks in his poems, which he could not do in his plays). He was right, too, in speaking of Pinero's " talent." Genius sweeps its possessors off their feet, makes them write or paint or act better than they know, puts into their work something that does not seem to have come from them at all, so that they ask themselves in wonderment, " Can this be mine? " Never had Pinero to put that query to himself. His talent shaped and arranged his plays, he had his characters always well in hand, they never galloped off, dragging him after them. If genius were truly (which of course it is not), an infinite capacity for attending to every detail, then Pinero would have set up an irresistible claim to it. Possibly Archer meant that.

SIR GEORGE ALEXANDER AND MISS IRENE VANBRUGH

in the Letters Scene from *His House in Order*.

Whatever he meant, Archer was a good friend to the British Stage: exaggeration can easily be forgiven to one who did as much to restore the worth and dignity of dramatic criticism as Pinero did to improve the quality of play-acting, as Irving did to give the theatre a place of honour in the national life. Each worked for the same end. Each contributed great endeavour, great because they did not aim chiefly at money rewards. Not one of the three worked in a commercial spirit. They had to live by their labours, but they kept ideals in view; they had a motive higher than mere desire to be rich.

The two plays with which Pinero followed up *His House in Order* illustrated the originality of his talent, the curious working of his mind. No other playwright could have written either *The Thunderbolt* or *Mid-Channel*: there was a flavour about each which only Pinero could impart. And they were so entirely different that it was hard to believe them the fruits of the same imagination. Both were satires, but while the first was based on humanity fundamental, eternal, the second showed up the nastiness of a little group of men and women corrupted by comfort and greed of a sort peculiar to a decaying civilization, and in no case representative of their kind. The same difference there was between *Iris* and *The Benefit of the Doubt*. The story of Theo Fraser was a story that might have been told of any woman at any time in the world's history. It was simple, moving, humane. The story of *Iris* was like a page torn from one of those Sunday newspapers which, in Britain

and America alike, serve up the records of squalid sexual misfortune, and what the French so cleverly call *crimes passionels*.

The Thunderbolt showed, as did *His House in Order*, the abasement of a family, self-sufficient, proud. The Mortimores were one of the oldest "and were bold enough to say one of the most respected families" in the town where four generations of them had lived and prospered, with a fifth growing up. One of them went away and made a fortune out of beer. Between him and his brothers and sisters there was an estrangement up to a day or two before his death. Then he sent them word that he was ill and would like to bid them farewell. After that he died, leaving £170,000 behind him and no will. The first act shows that familiar but always attractive scene—the gathering of relations to hear what is to become of a dead man's money. Often as that scene has been written, no author, before or since, has surpassed Pinero in grip of interest, in revelation of character, in humour.

The whole sum, it seems, will be shared among three brothers and a sister. The dead man left no one nearer to him than these, except an illegitimate daughter for whom he appears to have made no provision at all. About this girl nothing is known, but she is expected at the family gathering. When she arrives from Paris, where she has been studying art, and learns that her father took no pains, as far as can be discerned, to safeguard her future, she is "disappointed, hurt, not for the money's sake but

because—because I meant so much to him I've always believed." She does not complain, however, does not envy her uncle and aunt their fortunes. She says that her father " in leaving me merely with my education and the capacity for earning my living, has done more for my happiness—my real happiness—than if he had left me every penny he possessed."

She will not allow the others to think of making her an allowance. This has been discussed before her arrival and Phyllis, wife of the youngest brother, Thaddeus Mortimore, argues warmly for continuing to Helen the allowance her father made her. But Helen will have none of this.

" I don't need assistance," she tells them, " and, I couldn't accept it. I will accept nothing that hasn't come direct from my father."

Doing their best to conceal the joy with which these words fill them, the family ask her to stay with each household in turn. The only one she cares for is that of Thaddeus (" Tad "). He is a musician and poor, not a hard-boiled business man like his brothers; his wife fits in with him. She is still with them when the family are summoned to meet again. Efforts have been made to find out whether Helen's father made a will of any kind: the result of the advertising and circulars is now to be declared.

Phyllis, after one more effort to persuade Helen that she ought to accept an income, breaks down under a strain which has plainly been bowing her

down for some time. She tells her husband that all the money belongs to Helen.

THADDEUS

My dear, the family were prepared to offer——

PHYLLIS

No, no. He left every penny to her—*left* it to her. There was a will.

THADDEUS

A will?

PHYLLIS

I saw it.

THADDEUS

You saw it?

PHYLLIS

I read it—I had it in my hand.

THADDEUS. [*Incredulously*]

You did?

PHYLLIS

Yes, I—I did away with it.

THADDEUS

Did away with it?

PHYLLIS

Destroyed it.

Tad thinks his wife has lost her wits, but she tells him a circumstantial story; he is forced to believe it. Taking the place of a nurse one evening just before her brother-in-law died, she was sent by him to fetch something from a safe. In the safe she saw a will. She did not look at it. She took what she sought and went back to the bedroom. There she found the sick man changed for the worse. Watching him, she determined to go to the safe again and read the will. It left everything, she found to

"someone living in Paris" (neither she, nor any other member of the family, had known anything about Helen until after her father's death). It was "just a few lines—on one side of a sheet of paper." She took it, kept it about her for a day or two, then destroyed it.

This is a nice piece of news to take to the family gathering!

"Tad" does not reproach his wife. "We've got to go through it," he mutters, "got to go through it," and off he goes to repeat the story he has heard.

Of course the other members of the council take it badly. What he tells, however, is not his wife's confession; he takes her act upon himself. He pretends that he did everything she has admitted doing. He declares under cross-examination that he alone is to blame. But at last the truth is extracted in spite of his denials and the frustrated greed, the anger, the disappointment break out unashamed. Finally, Helen offers to share and share alike. "Tad" and his wife decline to take anything, but cannot hinder Helen from settling their share on their children. She does all she can to make their path as smooth as may be and marries a curate. As in so many of Pinero's plays, the end is the weakest part.

In this piece, Mrs. Patrick Campbell's daughter, Stella, appeared on the stage where her mother's triumph was won. She played Helen pleasantly, but without showing any of her mother's temperamental brilliance. George Alexander left his usual line of frock-coated, ambassadorial, aristocratic per-

sonages to make "Tad" a likeable creature and to play up to Mabel Hackney, the wife of Laurence Irving (she went down with him in the *Titanic* a few years later). Her performance was striking and sincere. She made the confession without any effort to gain sentimental sympathy in defiance of the author's wish, as most actresses would have done in her place. At the same time it was impossible not to feel pity for the nerve-racked wife and mother who had to pay the penalty for a moment's yielding to temptation.

There was some foolish denunciation of *The Thunderbolt* as "an insult to the provinces." A former Lord Mayor of Sheffield called it "a most unwarrantable attack on provincial life," and the president of a Manchester literary club, who ought to have known better, took the same line. But the protests were little more than a newspaper stunt and quickly died down, while the play ran on and on, and registered a complete success.

Mid-Channel was less fortunate. Not entirely because the story was looser, the interest not so skilfully aroused and maintained. Largely because the characters were so unattractive. They were in the reverse sense of a once-popular phrase, "vulgar without being funny," and vulgar in a peculiarly unpleasant way. One felt it a relief to get away from them.

Yet the idea on which the play built itself up in the author's mind was a very good idea indeed. Here it is in the words of Peter Blundell, who is trying

to make peace between Zoe Blundell and her husband Theodore in the fourteenth year of their union.

PETER

About half-way between Dover and Calais—no, it's between Folkestone and Boulogne, ain't it?

THEODORE. [*Examining the pictures in an illustrated paper*]
What?

PETER

Of course. About half-way between Folkestone and Boulogne—mid-Channel—there's a shoal.

THEODORE. [*Turning a page of his paper*]
What of it?

PETER

Le Colbart, the French sailor-men call it. We call it the Ridge. If you go by Folkestone and Boulogne, you'll pass over it.

THEODORE. [*Glancing at him suspiciously*]
Thanks for the valuable information.

PETER

D'ye know I've never encountered that blessed shoal without experiencin' a most unpleasant time?

ZOE. [*Addressing an envelope at her writing-table*]
Oh, my dear Peter!

PETER

I've crossed on some of the finest days of the year. The sun's been shinin' and outside the harbour the water's been as smooth as it's been inside. Everythin's looked as enticin' as could be, but as we've neared the Ridge—mid-Channel—I've begun to feel fidgety, restless, out o' sorts—hatin' myself and hatin' the man who's been sharing my cabin with me. But the sensation hasn't lasted long.

ZOE. [*Sealing her letter*]
Glad to hear it.

PETER

No; gradually the beastly motion has died down, and in a quarter of an hour or so I've found myself pacin' the deck

again, arm-in-arm with the travellin'-companion I've been positively loathin' a few minutes earlier.

THEODORE. [*Gaping demonstratively*]
Very interesting.

PETER
My dear pals, I remember the idea once occurrin' to me, there's a resemblance between that and marriage.

THEODORE. [*Shortly*]
Ha! Thought that was coming.

PETER
Yes, and marriage, mark you, at its best and brightest. The happiest and luckiest of married couples have got to cross that wretched Ridge. However successful the first half of their journey may be, there's the rough-and-tumble of mid-Channel to negotiate. Some arrive there quicker than others, some later; it depends on wind and tide. But they *get* there; and a bad time it is, and must be—a time when travellin' companions see nothing but the spots on each other's yellow faces and when innumerable kind words and innumerable kind acts are clean forgotten. But, as I tell you, it's soon over—*well* over, if only Mr. Jack and Mrs. Jill will understand the situation; if only they'll say to themselves, "We're on the Ridge, we're in mid-Channel; in another quarter of an hour the boat'll be steady again—as steady as when we stepped on to the gangway.

From this the nature of the "make" of the play can be understood. Peter is the "raisonneur" of Dumas *fils* and Augier drama. The characters are not human beings, they are "types."

Zoe typifies the still fairly-young wife of a dull, materially-minded business man—Pinero was always unkind to business men—living in a raffish moneyed set not quite "in society," not quite out of it.

That she has "men chums" betrays her level of refinement. That she calls them her "tame robins" who "come and eat crumbs off her window-sill"

shows there is no technical harm in her behaviour. Yet she admits (to Peter) that Theodore " goads her to desperation." She says she and her husband are sick to death of each other. " He's getting so stodgy and pompous and flat-footed. He drives me mad with his elderly ways." And so far as she can judge, he is " sick and tired of her."

" My little jokes and pranks that used to amuse him so—they annoy him now, scandalize him. He's continually finding fault with me, bullying me. As for my gowns or my hats—anything I put on—I might dress in sackcloth, he'd never observe it."

As for Blundell he declares (to Peter) that his wife makes herself " damnably absurd " by her " infernal fooling about with the boys, her ' tame robins,' a parcel of empty-headed young men." He has always been " intensely proud of her," he doesn't suppose any man has ever been in love with his wife for longer than he was. He has a very great affection for her still, or would have if her behaviour didn't check it. He does wish occasionally that she would feel as old as her years, which are thirty-seven.

So they get on each other's nerves and quarrel continually, and at last Blundell goes off in a rage and for a time they pursue their different ways. Zoe goes to Italy, allowing one of her " robins " to keep near her. Blundell keeps house with a lady of Paula Ray's profession, and is as sick of her in a few months as he had ever been of his wife.

Unhappily for him, after Zoe has agreed to overlook this, she admits that he must forgive her too, and lets out that in Italy she took the " tame robin "

for a mate. This knocks him over. His poor business man's "brain falters." He must have advice. He can't say "well, we've both been foolish. Let's wipe the slate clean." He must consult someone—Peter, of course, before he can decide what to do. Then he falls to maundering over the correctness of Peter's prophecy. "He's been right all along the line with his precious mid-Channel." But Zoe shakes her head. "*Our* marriage was doomed long, long before we reached mid-Channel."

THEODORE. [*Absently, not stirring*]

Oh!

ZOE

It was doomed nearly fourteen years ago.

THEODORE. [*As before*]

Oh!

ZOE

From the very beginning.

THEODORE. [*Raising his head*]

What d'ye——?

ZOE

It was doomed from the moment we agreed that we'd never be encumbered in our career with any brats of children. [*He partly turns in his chair to listen to her.*] I want you to remember that bargain in judging me; and I want you to tell Peter of it.

THEODORE

Yes, it suits you to rake that up now——

ZOE. [*Pressing her fingers to her temples*]

If there had been "brats of children" at home, it would have made a different woman of me, Theo; such a different woman of me—and—a different man of you. But no; everything in the earlier years of our marriage was sacrificed to coining money—to shoving our way through the crowd—to "getting on," everything was sacrificed to that.

THEODORE. [*Angrily*]

Oh!

ZOE

And then when we had succeeded—when we had got on—we had commenced to draw apart from each other; and there was the great showy empty house for me to fret and pine in. [*He waves his arms scornfully.*] Oh, yes, we were happy in those climbing days—greedily, feverishly happy; but we didn't look to the time when we should need another interest in life to bind us together—the time when we'd got on in years as well as in position. [THEODORE *starts up.*] Ah, Theo, I believe we should have crossed that Ridge safely enough but for our cursed, cursed selfishness.

Somehow as one reads it, it does not sound true. It did not sound true on the stage. Miss Irene Vanbrugh put all of her talent, all her subtlety and skill, into the part of Zoe, but never for a moment did she seem to be a real woman. There was no real womanliness in the character. Zoe was a type.

So that when she was said to have thrown herself off a balcony no feeling of pity was aroused. She could not be dead, for she had never been alive. She had been removed so that the piece might end. But nothing was there for tears, nothing for grief, to beat the breast, for she was not a woman but a lay figure just hired to fit into the playwright's design.

Paula Ray and Agnes Ebbsmith had the advantage of being played by an actress of genius. This made them seem more life-like than they were. But that actress could not have made them so effective if she had not been given material to work on. In *Iris* and *Mid-Channel* the material was lacking. Zoe made no more struggle against her misfortunes than Iris had made against her weaknesses. Paula did try to live her past down, Agnes did fight for her lover. Iris and Zoe were drifters and out of drifting no drama can be made.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE LATER YEARS

"In recent years it has become rather fashionable to disparage the plays of Sir Arthur Pinero. Most of this disparagement comes from people who have not seen his plays in the theatre and a great deal of it comes from people who have not even studied his plays in the library. It comes mainly from people who are ignorant of his work."—CLAYTON HAMILTON in *Conversations on Contemporary Drama*, 1924.

HOWEVER the English nation may slight or scorn men of letters in their youth and prime, it is frequently ready to make much of them when they have lived to be old. Thomas Hardy was one example of this; Robert Bridges is another; Bernard Shaw a third. Each of these, when they had reached the age of seventy, found neglect turned to raptures, polite indifference exchanged for an almost passionate interest in their every movement, their lightest word.

The few who all along had enjoyed and valued their work were then almost bewildered by the readiness of newspapers to print their portraits, their opinions, their jokes. They heard Hardy's most halting doggerel proclaimed great poetry by persons who had never read *The Return of the Native* or *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. They saw large space devoted in the popular Press to a childish charade by a Poet Laureate whose fine, austere verse had in the same pages been ignored for fifty years. They had to sub-

mit to rebuke for their lukewarmness over *The Apple Cart* from people who, when Bernard Shaw wrote wittily, called him a crank, a banana-biter, a poseur.

Could Byron (the poet, not the playwright) have lived to ninety, Queen Victoria would have had him to dine and sleep at Windsor Castle; he would have been asked by magazines for his view on the Best Hundred Books. If Anatole France had died as young as Guy de Maupassant, he would have got, like de Maupassant, an obscure four-line obituary in *The Times* instead of a column and a half of large type.

It is true that the aged must, in order to win their almost posthumous popularity, play up to the publicity which is offered them. That is why Pinero, if the offer had come to him, would not have been able to embrace it. He has had throughout his life a horror of self-advertisement which is almost morbid. It even led him to decline the proposal that a performance of a play or scenes from plays should be given in honour of his seventy-fifth birthday.

He was, he wrote, "profoundly grateful, but it can't be.

"It would be affectation on my part to say that I shun publicity. The publicity earned by my work in the ordinary way is one of the prizes for which I labour. To consent, however, to such a festival—what else can I call it?—would be tantamount to an act of self-advertisement, and I am so old-fashioned that self-advertisement in any form is abhorrent to me."

That is one reason why the later years of Pinero

have been passed out of sight of the public. It may be there are other reasons. He may have tired of the prominent place he occupied. He may have felt that he had fought the good fight and finished his course.

Recognized as the head of his branch of authorship, rewarded by the Government with a knighthood, wealthy as the result of his untiring labour, it would not be surprising if he preferred to enjoy his ease with dignity and to turn his back on those "public means" which, in him, did not "public manners breed," but which did prevent a full advantage being taken of privacy.

That, however, is not an explanation to hold water. For Pinero has continued to write and publish plays. He continued, as long as managers would take the risk, to produce them. He certainly has not turned his back upon the public. Far from being tired either of his position or of his profession, he works at play-writing with energy undiminished.

To account for the shadow under which this work has for many years been done we must seek further. The cause is to be found, not in Pinero himself, but in the disparagement which (as an American critic admits in the quotation at the head of this chapter) has fallen upon his plays.

Often it happens that writers who have gained a full meed of popularity and profit in earlier years are left in the cold shade of forgetfulness when they have grown old. The favourites of one period, they are unknown to the next. The "hungry generations" tread them down. They are forced to accept the

intimation that their work was for an age, not for all time.

This fate is all but certain to befall writers of plays in England. In other European countries the literature which takes dramatic shape is kept alive along with that which is found in books. There are theatres in France, in Germany, in Scandinavia, where the drama of the past can be studied as well as that of the present. Britain has no institution of this kind. We cherish in our capital a National Gallery of Paintings from the past, a National Gallery of Portraits, a Gallery of Modern Pictures. Every city of any size and self-respect makes a municipal collection. The theatre, thanks to the Puritans in the first place, and in the second to the Playwrights themselves, has had since the seventeenth century a bad name among us.

It did not greatly matter, so long as our dramatists were "at the very bottom of the literary ladder," whether we had a National Theatre to take its place beside our National Gallery, or not. No one with a sense of literary value could want to preserve the plays of Kenny and Albery, of Talfourd and W. G. Wills—nor even those of an R. C. Carton, a Henry Arthur Jones. But since Pinero lifted play-writing to the position which it now holds, a recognized and honoured branch of literature, the need for a stage in which the best plays of each age shall be preserved by occasional presentation has become serious, urgent even.

How pitiful it is that the best work of Pinero should

be known intimately only to those who were playgoers more than twenty years ago! True, the money to be made by successful play-writing is larger in amount than the novelist can hope to earn. From *Journey's End* the author drew in twelve months a profit of £50,000. Yet what a depressing oblivion awaits the dramatist when his quickly passing popularity is over. His work is not seen, it is scarcely so much as mentioned, it has ceased to count for anything save in the memories of those who are not much younger than he is himself.

At one time Pinero poured scorn upon the National Theatre project, taking the line which most actors and theatrical managers took. It was a new idea, therefore an absurd one. In 1904 he expressed his dislike of it to William Archer, who promised to convert him in time and did so quickly. In 1908, replying for the Drama at a Mansion House banquet given by the Lord Mayor of London, the dramatist spoke earnestly in favour of the scheme then launched (still floating uncompleted in 1930!) for a Shakespeare Memorial Theatre with a large repertory of the plays of all periods in our dramatic annals. A meeting had been held at the Mansion House to make this scheme known and Pinero declared that, when it gained force, it would "take rank with the noblest and most serviceable movements" which had had their origin in that historic residence of the chief executive of the City of London.

To that opinion he has remained steadfast. He has not ceased to use his best endeavours in the cause

of "an English Theatre where the whole of our drama can be studied in its best examples, a theatre which has never been needed more than it is needed now—for the sake of our dramatic authors and our players, for the sake of the public, for the sake of the art of the stage."

With no such theatre in existence, it is exceedingly difficult to form any judgment of a British Dramatist's work at all. No one under forty-five can speak of Granville Barker's plays; of Galsworthy's early output for the theatre. Unless one goes to Dublin one can get no full acquaintance with the drama of Synge. Full acquaintanceship with a play means seeing it acted. It was written to be acted. Its effects can only be judged properly when it is judged in the theatre. Reading may yield enjoyment, but the more this is enjoyed, the more regret must be felt that the play is not acted.

It is unfortunately an additional disadvantage to writers of plays that the habit of reading fiction in play-form has not been formed in Britain yet by more than a few people. It requires more imagination than most readers of novels can bring to it.

That obstacle might be removed by printing not merely descriptions of scenery but sketches of character, not "stage directions" alone, but directions to the reader to notice this, to listen carefully here, to recall there what was said in an earlier scene.

Pinero prints long, detailed, exact explanations of rooms and the furniture in them. It is doubtful whether any reader does more than glance at these—

unless a play is being read with a performance of it in view. They are unnecessary for any purpose but that. They give the printed page a technical, forbidding look.

Far more enlightening as well as more interesting would information about the characters be. This, too, would give a play more the accustomed appearance of a novel. It would not seem so strange, so skeleton-like; its bones would be covered with some comfortable flesh.

The inability to cover them for themselves by which so many readers are afflicted makes it impossible for published plays to keep alive a reputation. They may serve as a reminder that their authors once were applauded and admired. Alone, they cannot do more than that. Some at any rate of their number must be from time to time acted. Perhaps, even during the period of waiting for the National Theatre which will certainly come, we may see more revivals of Pinero plays. The demand for revivals will be stimulated by an increase in the number of those who read them. I hope this book will be found useful by many who are pleased with what they have seen of Pinero's work and have lacked opportunity to become acquainted with the whole body of it.

It may stimulate their interest, it may perchance create a fresh interest. If it turns attention to the published plays (which are issued in a handy and attractive shape by Heinemann) and persuades people to read and form their own judgment upon them, it will have served its purpose. There is no doubt that,

MR. OWEN NARES

who played the shell-shocked hero of *The Enchanted Cottage*.

granted a taste for the dramatic form of story-telling, their judgment will be warmly favourable. The talents which equip Pinero for the task of writing plays would set up at least half a dozen average novelists. Had he chosen to throw his work into the form of novels he would have won an undisputed reputation as a man of letters.

That this title should not be universally conceded to him is a result of the muddle-headed view which is generally accepted in respect of plays claiming to rank as literature. Uncritical critics are too ready to declare any play "literary" if its author has introduced into his dialogue such scraps of "fine" and "flowery" writing as any tyro, if he followed a sound and well-known maxim, would at once cut out. This, of course, is merely the point of view of persons ignorant both of what is implied when proper use is made of the word "literary" and of the elements of dramatic composition. But there are many people of wider intelligence who are in doubt as to the essentials of a play that may justly be lifted out of the ruck of pieces endurable only as acting dramas and granted the right to this much-coveted and much-talked-about term—literature.

The essential distinction, to my mind, can be stated in some such way as this.

A skilfully contrived play may appeal strongly to the emotions and enforce interest in its developments in spite of weaknesses and even absurdities that become apparent as soon as the curtain has fallen—as soon as it is considered in any other light than that

of an entertainment calculated solely to keep an audience amused and interested for the brief space of two or three hours. Judged from this standpoint, by the verdict of the majority, a Drury Lane melodrama or a play like *The Bells* may equal in merit the most brilliant efforts of Congreve and Sheridan, the wittiest comedy of Molière or Dumas *fils*, the most poetical or the most pregnant of the plays of Shakespeare himself.

But the reason why the works of these writers have come to be regarded as great achievements in literature as well as excellent stage plays, lies in the fact that they will bear the closest scrutiny, the most severely critical consideration in the study; that their pages glow with poetry, with imagination, with wit and fancy, with a wide knowledge of human character and human life; that they are founded upon observation at first hand and written with the pen that only genius knows how to wield.

A play possessing none of these qualities, a play built up carefully upon a basis of a little humanity imperfectly understood and an intolerable deal of stage trickery only too well remembered—a play in which the characters are puppets, the situations strained and unreal, the plot mechanical, the sentiment false, may yet succeed in creating illusion when it is cleverly represented by capable actors and actresses. A play, on the other hand, that can lay any claims to the title of literature must create its illusions by natural means, by means that are not seen to be inartistic and crude as soon as we have

escaped from the glamour of the playhouse. The characters must be real people, not stage people: the developments such as would occur in the greater world that lies beyond the small world of the hack dramatist. Blemishes that are, perhaps, unnoticed in an acted play, or that may be condoned in view of the limitations imposed by the conditions of the stage, are unforgivable in a book printed to be read and not merely to serve the purposes of a prompt copy.

It does not follow that a play written by a man of undoubted literary talent will be a literary play. The contrary has too often been proved. A good novelist, if he tries his hand at a play, probably writes good dialogue. But frequently the persons who seem to live in the pages of his novels are stilted and artificial on the stage. Frequently his situations are bald, undramatic; or else, from a desire to make them broad and forcible enough to stand the test of the theatre, they are over-coloured and sensational. Very often his power of writing brilliant dialogue is used without a due sense of character. In such cases the literary man's dramas read no better nor have any better claim to the title of literature than the efforts of playwrights who have gone through no literary training and find it difficult even to write correct English.

It is not merely good writing that makes a play literary in the real meaning of the term. It is such writing as knows how to fit every speech to the character of the person who utters it. If the people

are illiterate, they must talk in an illiterate manner. Fine writing is the dramatist's worst enemy.

To sum up then, a play that is to rank as literature must convince the reader in as great measure as it convinces the spectators who see it acted, must so influence his imagination that its characters and scenes are as clear to his mind's eye as if it were being interpreted to him in the playhouse by actors capable of appreciating and carrying out the author's wishes and design.

Tried by this touchstone the plays of Pinero may not be great works, but they are, many of them, literature—quite as good as the novels and romances of the period. Indeed, considering the difficulties against which Pinero has had to contend, their literary excellence, according to the canons laid down, is high. Pinero's dialogue alone gives him an indisputable claim to be treated as a man of letters. "It is true," said Fox, on one occasion, "that I am never in want of a word, but Pitt always has *the* word." Pinero has, to compare small things with great, the happy knack of finding *the* word. Add to this the humanity of the plays, the observation that shines through them, the striving after something better than the poor conventions and artificialities of the stage as he found it, we here have the causes of Pinero's position and influence as the leading dramatist of to-day.

With that influence, that position, he might have been content during the later years—might have been if he were not Pinero. Being Pinero, he can no

more cease working than he could cease breathing. At seventy-five he works as systematically, with as much interest in what he does, as he worked at thirty—or forty—or fifty-five. And he has not changed his view of humanity. He is still a satirist, still likes to turn a light into dark corners of our social arrangements.

He did, it is true, make one experiment in another direction. It was not a success. *The Enchanted Cottage*, produced in 1922, suffered under the same difficulty as meets anyone who tries to put on the stage the story of The Emperor's New Clothes. If the potentate actually wears what he only imagines he is wearing, the effect is spoiled for spectators of imagination. If he wears nothing, the unimaginative balk.

What Pinero tried to show was the effect of love on a young man broken in the war and a young woman without any attractions in her appearance, whom he had married in order to prevent his mother and stepfather from interfering in his life. But the very stage direction which introduced the young woman proved that the author did not understand his own imagery. He described her as "thin, exceedingly plain, with a sallow, unhealthy complexion, colourless lips, and a poor flat chest. Her dull and scanty hair is drawn tightly from her temples and she is so pronouncedly round-shouldered as almost to give the impression that she is deformed. She is wearing a shabby little frock which accentuates her leanness."

After that, it is useless to add: "she has an air of quiet cheerfulness and her voice is soft and sweet." For a woman with a sallow unhealthy skin, dull hair, and lips without any colour in them could not possess a "soft sweet voice." Her tones would be "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh."

Soon after they have accomplished their marriage of convenience, the pair come in, transformed into "splendid specimens of glowing womanhood and vigorous young manhood." Laura's "simple dinner-gown displays a pair of shapely arms and perfectly modelled throat; her eyes are big and luminous, her figure is full, her hair bright and luxuriant, her face faultless in its complexion and contour." As for Oliver, he is no longer "a wreck," he has lost all trace of lameness, he is "a straight lissom chap, as handsome as ever and is full of vigour and activity." This is how the bride and bridegroom appear in each other's eyes. "Love's blind, they say."

The odd thing is that the change occurred before they had learned to love one another. They were altered on their return to the enchanted cottage from the church where they had married "for mutual consolation only, to keep each other in countenance as it were," their acquaintance before this having been of the very slightest. They appear in the presence of a blind man as they imagine each other, but as soon as they are seen they are to other eyes once more "the poor wreck of a man" and the uncomely young woman of the first act. However, they are still under the illusion themselves, and their

servant at the " enchanted cottage," a woman with some vague suggestion of a witch about her, tells them that so long as they " keep their love burning, they'll never be anything to one another but fair and bonny."

What the author of this attempt to write a Barrie fantasy did not possess was poetic imagination. A grain of it would have shown him that a woman so kindly and cheerful and charming as Laura could never look like an unwholesome, self-neglectful hag. Her eyes would have been bright with sympathy, her hair would have shone with the gloss of health. She might have lacked beauty of form and feature, but she could not have even distantly resembled the picture Pinero drew.

Nor could he make up his mind whether to say the cottage was enchanted or to leave the enchanting to natural means. The fantastic element failed therefore, and there was no other interest in the piece to make it live. Pinero returned to his usual view—what might be called a lawyer's opinion of men and women.

Lawyers see the less attractive side of human nature. They are concerned, not with them that are morally sound, but with them that are morally sick. Their experience is that of Ibsen: only the " bad potatoes come under their notice." Whether those early years which he spent in a lawyer's office coloured the young Pinero's view of his fellow-creatures, whether it was due to his legal forbears, or whether he was more interested in the abnormal than ordinary flesh and

blood, it is impossible to say for certain. Probably a little of all three. At all events it is undeniable that in the plays Pinero cares to be known by there are very few prominent characters with whom we should care to live or even to meet on a voyage. In the drawing of nice, gentle, commonplace yet lovable men and women he has no interest at all. Out of all his men, who leave pleasant memories with us but Noel Brice, Dick Phenyl, and Tad Mortimore? Of all his women the most attractive to my mind is Ottoline de Chaume, in *The Big Drum*, next to her comes Fay Zuliani in *Iris*.

One recalls Letty as a pathetic little mouse, Sophy Fullgarney as a plucky little cat. One chuckles over the thought of George Tid in the Dean's drawing-room, of Miss Dyott's return to her school in the costume of a musical comedy queen. One thinks of the splendid insolence of Mrs. Paula Tanqueray, the crumpled pitifulness of Theo Fraser, the hard, bright charm of the Mind-the-Paint Girl. But there is not a woman of commanding character, of noble emotion, in the whole of Pinero's work.

Of men he takes the Lawyer's view. Women he regards with a Victorian eye. The home is the place for them. When they have strayed from home, been naughty or thoughtless, they must go for recovery to a Bishop's palace or a rural rectory, they must marry photographers or rich, simple Bacon Kings. If they are married already, they must return to their firesides penitent, ashamed.

This is the strongest cause of Pinero's fall from

popularity in the early years of the twentieth century: that he did not either understand or like the new twentieth century kind of girl and woman. He tried hard to present her, as Mrs. Ebbsmith, as Mrs. Zoe Blundell in *Mid-Channel*. She could not get away from Bibles and cradles. She snatched from a stove the Holy Scripture, she caterwauled about the difference having children would have made in her. She was, in a word, Victorian. The younger generation either yawned or gibed.

He seemed to accept their decision. He retired into rigidly private life. He made no effort to get his plays performed. He did nothing to keep himself or his work before the public. His motive for this reticence he exposed in a play written just as he was disappearing from view.

Mention of *The Big Drum*, a page or two back, may have puzzled even Pinero's faithful admirers, as it puzzled me when I read it in the list of his published plays. I had not so much as heard of it. Produced during the war, in September 1915, it escaped all those of us who were then far from England, seeing London newspapers days, maybe weeks, late; thinking little of any drama but the one that was unrolled before us every day. However, in London the motto was "amusement as usual," so *The Big Drum* occupied the stage of the St. James's, on which several of its author's greatest successes had preceded it.

The title was also the title of a novel written by a man who hated puffery with Pinero's own hatred.

Indeed, when Philip Mackworth denounced it, one heard Pinero's voice.

A friend implores Mackworth who has not done very well with his novels to advertise.

ROOPE

Dash it, they've got to advertise soap, and soap's essential. Why not literature, which isn't? And yet you won't find the name of Mr. Philip Mackworth in the paper from one year's end to another, except in a scrubby criticism now and again.

PHILIP. [*Calmly*]

Excuse me, there are the publishers' announcements.

ROOPE

Publishers' announcements! I'm not speaking of the regular advertising columns. What I want to see are paragraphs concerning you mixed up with the news of the day, information about you and your habits, interviews with you, letters from you on every conceivable topic——

PHILIP

Do you?

ROOPE

Oh, my dear Phil, I entreat you, feed the papers. It isn't as if you hadn't talent; you *have*. Advertising *minus* talent goes a long way; advertising *plus* talent is irresistible. Feed the papers. The more you do for them the more they'll do for you. *Quid pro quo*.

The novelist shrugs his shoulders, refuses to take the course suggested. His friend loses patience.

ROOPE

Upon my word, your hatred of publicity is—is—is—is morbid. It's worse than morbid—it's Victorian.

PHILIP

Who says I have a hatred pf publicity? *I* haven't said anything so absurd. Don't I write for the public?

ROOPE

Exactly!

PHILIP

I have no dislike for publicity, for fame. By George, sir! I covet it, if I can win it honestly and decently.

ROOPE. [*Shrugging his shoulders*]

Ah——!

PHILIP

And I humble myself before the men and women of my craft—and they are many—who succeed in winning it in that fashion, or who are content to remain obscure. But for the rest—the hustlers of the pen, the seekers after mere blatant applause, the pickers-up of cheap popularity—I've a profound contempt for them and their methods.

ROOPE

You can't deny the ability of some of them.

PHILIP

Deny it? Of course I don't deny it. But no amount of ability, of genius if you will, absolves the follower of any art from the obligation of conducting himself as a modest gentleman.

ROOPE

Ah, there's where you're so hopelessly Victorian and out of date.

PHILIP

Well, that's my creed, and whether I've talent or not, I'd rather snuff out, when my time comes, neglected and a pauper, than go back on it.

That is Pinero's creed, too. He has lived up to it. His private life he did not expose to view. Motley was never "the only wear" for him. He shrank even from the "honest, decent" publicity of his profession, seldom appeared at his first nights, scarcely ever responded to calls for the author by appearing on the stage at the end of a play.

No Press agent has ever been employed by him. He has not "fed the newspapers," or written letters "on every conceivable topic," or attended funerals of distinguished persons he did not know, so as to get his name mentioned (this was a habit of a prominent character in *The Big Drum*). He felt strongly, even bitterly, the degradation of these practices. Into Philip Mackworth's mouth Pinero, as individual, put his angry protest. Yet, as author, he allowed him to fall away from his high resolves—as if admitting the forces against which they both struggled were too powerful to be withstood.

Here were the circumstances: Philip had once loved Ottoline Filson, daughter of an amusing couple of "climbers" who grew rich in the Argentine; came back to Europe prosperous nobodies, eager to elbow themselves into a respectable social position; settled in Paris.

Mackworth was writing for fashion papers then. It was because Ottoline asked him to "puff" her family that they quarrelled, with the result that she married, out of pique, a French count. Mackworth had wounded her deeply. "To have a request refused me was sufficiently mortifying; but to be whipped, scourged, scarified into the bargain——!" That was ten years ago.

Now they meet again. Ottoline is a widow. Philip believed his love dead, but it flares up at sight of her and they determine to marry, but only when Philip has "achieved a solid success, when I've captured the great public and can come to you, not

as a poor, struggling writer, but holding my prizes in both hands."

Further he goes than this. He promises Ottoline's father and mother, who are bitterly disappointed that she does not make a fashionable match, that if his next novel is not the success he believes it will be —" an indisputable popular success "—he will join with them in urging Ottoline to give him up.

What is the nature of the book which is to win for Philip that sort of success? " It's an attempt," he says, explaining it to Ottoline's parents who live for publicity, " to portray the struggle for notoriety, for self-advertisement, we see going on around us."

SIR RANDLE

Ah yes, lamentable!

PHILIP

It shows a vast crowd of men and women forcing themselves upon public attention without a shred of modesty, fighting to obtain it as if they were fighting for bread and meat. It shows how dignity and reserve have been cast aside as virtues that are antiquated and outworn, until half the world—the world that should be orderly, harmonious, beautiful—has become an arena for the exhibition of vulgar ostentation or almost superhuman egoism—a cockpit resounding with raucous voices bellowing one against the other!

SIR RANDLE

A terrible picture!

LADY FILSON

Terrible!

PHILIP

It shows the bishop and the judge playing to the gallery, the politician adopting the methods of the cheap-jack, the duchess vying with the puffing draper; it shows how even true genius submits itself to conditions that are accepted and

excused as " modern " and is found elbowing and pushing in the hurly-burly. It shows how the ordinary decencies of life are sacrificed to the paragraphist, the interviewer and the ghoul with the camera; how the home is stripped of its sanctity, blessed charity made a parade-ground for display; the very grave-yard transformed into a parade-ground; while the outsider looks on with a sinking of the vitals because the drumstick is beyond his reach and the bom-bom-bom is not for *him*.

That is the theme both of the novel and the play. Pinero had touched upon it in *The Times*. *The Big Drum* was a fiercer, more determined onslaught on what he conceives to be one of the most unwholesome features of the age. In those speeches of the novelist he speaks, as he seldom did in his plays, for himself.

Well, the novel comes out. In two months 25,000 copies are sold. Philip and Ottoline are to be married. Her pushful parents are reconciled to it now that he has accomplished a " best seller." In his rooms he is about to entertain them at dinner, to celebrate both his triumph and their engagement, now to be officially announced.

Before the hour fixed for dinner Ottoline's brother appears. He is as great a snob as his father, and not so amiable. He is in a state of excitement. He tells Philip he has discovered everything. He has employed a private inquiry agent. He is going to expose the fraud.

Philip is bewildered. What is it all about? Bertram refuses to believe that he does not know. After a heated scene Philip says: " Well, get your detective

Photo by Edmund Harrington]

MISS MARIE LÖHR

in the part of George Tid, sister to the Dean of St. Marvell's, in *Dandy Dick*.

here. Let me hear what he has to say." So the private inquiry agent is telephoned for.

Before he appears Ottoline, her father and mother, and Roope have arrived. Philip tells them dinner may be a little late. He explains that Bertram has brought some accusation against him, makes the suggestion that the success of the books is not genuine. This charge must be refuted before they can sit down.

The gradual unfolding of the discovery is handled with Pinero's perfect mastery of stagecraft. Bertram had suspicions, sent round to libraries asking if the book was in demand, was told No; inquired at booksellers, sales nothing out of the ordinary; then got hold of a clerk in the publisher's office, and learned that the bulk of the 25,000 had been consigned to a small city office, where they lie in cases which nobody makes the least effort to despatch.

Clearly Philip is not concerned in the deception. One suspects Ottoline. Soon she admits that she bought the copies, the little city office belongs to her. She was afraid the book had failed, so she went to the publisher, bargained with him and the trick was played.

That is the end of the story. Philip might forgive Ottoline for deluding him—after all it was her love for him which drove her on; he could not forgive her for making him look such a fool. Yet Pinero made him not only forgive her but propose to marry her and live on her money. He made her refuse in a self-accusing speech as unreal as that of Egerton

Bompas in *The Times*. She had seen herself, she declares, "as she really is."

PHILIP

As you—are?

OTTOLINE

An incurably vulgar woman. An incurably, common, vulgar woman. Nobody but a woman whose vulgarity is past praying for could have conceived such a scheme. This—how shall I term it?—this refinement of mine is merely on the surface. We women are like the—what's the name of the little reptile? The chameleon, isn't it? We catch the colour of our surroundings. But what we were we continue to be—in the grain. The vulgar-minded Ottoline Filson who captivated and disgusted you in Paris is before you at this moment.

No woman, no man either, ever talked so.

We may accuse ourselves of crime, of infamies; we may plead guilty to ingratitude, dishonesty, lying. But no one says "I am a vulgar person" because vulgarity means not seeing that one is vulgar. It was vulgar as well as stupid of Ottoline (though she is a charming creature through it all) to buy those novels. But, while she would have admitted her stupidity, she could not have seen that she had been vulgar. For if she had been capable of seeing, she would not have been!

So Pinero made this queer couple part again after a thin, unconvincing last act.

"At the first representation, however," he explains in a preface, "the audience was reported to have been saddened by its unhappy ending. Pressure was forthwith put upon me to reconcile Philip and Ottoline, and at the third performance the cur-

tain fell upon the picture, violently and crudely brought about, of Ottoline in Philip's arms."

The alteration was made, Pinero adds, " against my principles and against my conscience, and yet not altogether unwillingly." For the times were depressing " and perhaps in such times it is the first duty of a writer for the stage to make concessions to his audiences, and above everything to try and afford them a complete, if brief, distraction from the gloom which awaits them outside the theatre."

Those who condemn that off-hand as weak, as unworthy of a dramatic author with high conceptions of what dramatic authorship should be, must pause and consider the circumstances. Admitting that Pinero ought, as a sternly self-respecting artist, to have said, " No matter what the loss to my pocket, I will not forfeit my self-respect—and I can well afford the loss," was he to condemn the manager who produced the play, the actors and actresses, everyone employed in the theatre, to suffer loss with him—loss which many of them certainly could *not* afford? The verdict must be that, on the whole, he did rightly—especially when we reflect that, as in the case of *The Profligate*, both endings, happy and unhappy, were equally ill-conceived. Indeed, it is only an ill-conceived ending that can be altered. When a play comes to a right finish, no demand for that finish to be changed is ever made.

So occupied were Pinero's thoughts with the evils of self-advertisement that he wrote yet another play satirizing those who descended to it. He became

even a shade morbid about what is really mere matter for chaff than for denunciation. Again, however, he denounced it in what he called "a serious farce," published under the title *Child Man*.

This showed another author whose works, like those of Philip Mackworth, were too good to bring him success. Frankly, it is hard to believe that Philip Mackworth wrote novels of merit; his turgid talk suggested nothing of the kind. Nor is it easy to credit Anthony Cuthbertis with historical ability. However, no matter what was the quality of his works, they did not provide his wife and two children with the existence they considered they were entitled to. So his wife suggested at the prompting of a friend that he should write a different kind of book.

"Books about children are in fashion," the friend says, "and take my tip, they'll be a positive rage before they've played out." So this is what Lorna Cuthbertis proposes to her husband as his next effort.

"Not a book dealing with giants and witches and old-fashioned bunk of that kind, but a record—an intelligent record—of the dawning intelligence, the quaint imaginings of the small folk; a book that analyses them, probes them, drills holes, as it were, in their baby flesh, and peers into their innocent souls. A mixture of poetry, philosophy, fun and frolic, entertainment for grown-ups and young people."

At first Lorna was revolted by the notion of an author "turning his offspring into pounds, shillings and pence" but she needs the pounds, shillings and

pence so badly that she is quickly won over. Anthony repels the idea fiercely until the friend says it is just as well he doesn't mean to try, for he couldn't do it. Then Anthony determines to do it—and succeeds.

He becomes a celebrity. "He might be a Royalty, a Lady Diana the way they persist in photographing him." He has written book after book about his children, who have turned into detestable masses of affectation. He himself is obliged to "dress the part" of the Child Man and to make his appearance ridiculous. But—he has made money. His family have everything they want.

This, however, does not satisfy him. He chafes under the knowledge that he is a sham. "Better be a mediocrity than a sham," he says. At last he can bear his position no longer. He resolves to go back to his old labours.

As he says nothing about the money he must have saved during his prosperity, we are left to assume that he will enjoy a comfortable income and that his talk about "reduced circumstances" is merely for effect.

The bitterness of the satire strikes one as excessive. It is like using poison gas of the deadliest kind to destroy rabbits.

Happily the gall stirred in the dramatist's mind exhausts itself on the written page. There is no trace of it in his conversation which is genial, amiable, broadly tolerant as ever. Surrounded by his books, by the portraits and caricatures of old

friends, by comfort of the cheering unostentatious variety, his little house in Harley Street contains a busy, kindly, not unhappy man, still working at seventy-five, still interested in all that is passing on the stage of human life.

He can look back over his long life's work, content. Not solely has it brought him success, prosperity; it has helped to lift the British drama to a position entirely different from that in which he found it. The purpose planted in his mind by the example of Henry Irving was steadily followed; his efforts were rewarded. He was the first of regular modern writers for the stage in England to conceive of an acted drama which should be a branch of literature, the first to claim for plays the dignity of the printed page, the first to raise a hatchet against the undergrowth of prejudice and the tall masts of contempt which hindered dramatic advance. Others have cut their way further into the forest, but all honour to the man who blazed the trail.

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